# Mr Fleight

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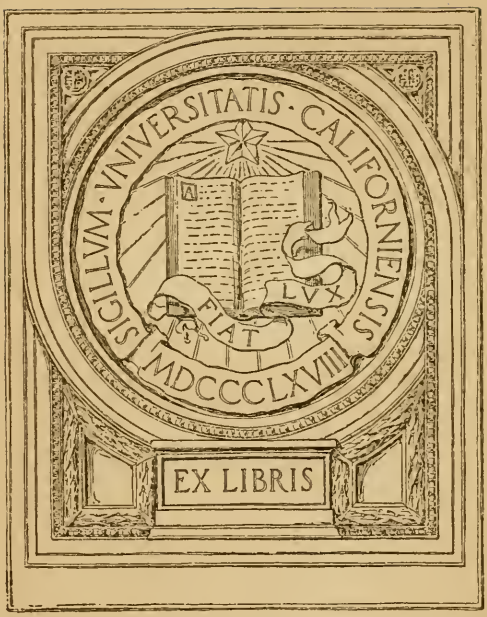
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# MR. FLEIGHT

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# Mr. FLEIGHT

BY

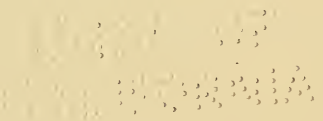
FORD MADOX HUEFFER

"In no faltering tones the candidate proclaimed the virtues of the constitution of our country, the twin pillars of its shining façade being the unspotted purity of the British Parliamentary machine, and the inviolability of the British hearth."

*Herefordshire Weekly Chronicle.*

"Stat insignissimum templum . . . . accedente consensu cleri et populi tanquam eis fuisset a Domino inspiratum."

*Chronicle of Amiens.*



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TO THAT UNSURPASSED WRITER OF ENGLISH,

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AND

CHRONICLER OF THE CONQUISTADORES

R. B. CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM

OF RIGHT KING OF SCOTLAND,

KNOWN TO THIS DULLY REVOLVING WORLD AS A

REVOLUTIONIST

AND IN ALL REALMS OF ADVENTURE

MOST CHIVALROUS

# PART I

# MR. FLEIGHT

## I

A LITTLE, dark man approached Mr. Blood, who sat in a deep armchair of the What Not Club. Mr. Blood, a heavy, grey man of ferocious aspect, was surveying the Thames, the Club occupying ground floor rooms of the great pile of buildings called Whitehall Court.

It was not a good club ; its membership conveyed no social prestige. Mr. Blood took no active part in the affairs of the world. That he was a nonsensical Radical amused his friends, since he was a large landowner ; that he had a violent character gave him a certain distinctness. He was said to have strangled a groom at Newport, Rhode Island, where, presumably, grooms are cheap.

The little dark man was known to the waiters as Mr. Fleight, but none of the members knew him. He had sat for half an hour gazing at Mr. Blood ; Mr. Blood had gazed at the Embankment. There had been no other soul in the room, for it was Derby Day. And then Mr. Fleight, as the clock finished striking four, jumped up and went with a hurried determination towards Mr. Blood.

"My name"—he really shivered the words out—"is Fleight—Aaron Rothwell Fleight—and I want to do something."

Mr. Blood exclaimed:

"Good God!" in tones of such disgust that he appeared on the point of being sick.

"I've known you—I've known of you—for years," Mr. Fleight stammered; "ever since I was at Oxford. My tutor was old Plodge. He had been yours, too. He always spoke of you as the strongest irregular intellect of his day. I've followed your—your career. No, it's not a career. But if you'll let me . . . Half an hour."

Mr. Blood kept his gaze fixed on the Embankment and exclaimed further, but with abstraction:

"Ninety-six: three hundred and eight."

"It doesn't prove anything," Mr. Fleight said desperately.

"Who the devil said it did?" Mr. Blood ejaculated. "What's it got to do with you? What are you talking about?"

"You've been counting the motors against the horse traffic," Mr. Fleight said. "In the last half hour you have counted those numbers. But it does not prove anything because this is Derby Day, and the traffic is out of the normal."

"Aaron Rothwell Fleight!" Mr. Blood speculated as disagreeably as he could. "What sort of a name is that for a human being? Half Scotch, half Hebrew! That's what it is."

"I'm not saying that it's anything else," Mr. Fleight conceded humbly.

"And with that record you come to me?" Mr. Blood cried out. "To me!"

" I don't see why I shouldn't." Mr. Fleight advanced more boldly.

" You don't ! " Mr. Blood whispered in a tone almost of awe. " Have you any idea why I come to this unspeakable club and risk getting spoken to by its unspeakable members ? "

" To count the traffic on Derby Day," Mr. Fleight said. " I don't know any other reason. You have been here on Derby Day for the last three years. I suppose it's a hobby, and you come on Derby Day because racing rather bores you, but the Club is empty. I don't suppose there is any other reason."

Mr. Blood looked round on Mr. Fleight with the air of, for the first time, almost acknowledging that he existed.

" You're not such an abject ass," he conceded unwillingly.

" I never said I was," Mr. Fleight said. " I only want to complain that I am nobody. Nobody ! The unknown member of a rotten club, although I've got pots of money. Enormous pots of money. All the money of Aaron Rothweil, the soap man. And Palatial Hall, at Hampstead. And all his factories and works. Everything. So it does not seem *right* that I should be nobody. Society being what it is, I feel that I ought to be Prime Minister, or a Privy Councillor at least."

Mr. Blood exclaimed :

" By Jove, you are right ! " He looked at Mr. Fleight appraisingly. " You want me to help you. Why ? "

" You see," Mr. Fleight opened his story, and he ventured to sit down, not in the chair opposite Mr. Blood, but on its arm, " I was going mad. No, not mad—on the point of screaming hysteria."

"That's good," Mr. Blood said; "good for a fellow who aspires to my friendship."

"Oh, not your friendship," Mr. Fleight answered. "The most I dare to want is to be your instrument—your flail."

"Eh!" Mr. Blood ejaculated.

"I know that's too active a simile," Mr. Fleight said, "but I can't think of anything better for the moment. I know you're too lazy even to mock at Society, let alone to hit it or destroy it. But say I'm the fox with the tail on fire that you could set going into the corn. If you heartened up a chap like me to becoming a duke and hereditary standard-bearer—and Heaven knows I'm rich enough—you'd laugh. It would be just as funny as watching the cabs on the Embankment."

"You're deucedly familiar," Mr. Blood grumbled.

"I am," Mr. Fleight said; "and I'm talking some nonsense. But it's my only chance, and I seem to know you. I seem to know you so well. I met you when you came down to Oxford in '94 to stay with old Plodge. I heard you talking for three whole nights, for three solid hours each. Old Plodge had me in—with an object. I'm not setting up to claim acquaintance with you on that account—only knowledge. I don't mind saying I've followed you about since then. I joined this club when I saw you were a member. I've joined every club you belonged to that I could get into. Why, I heard you lecturing the King!"

"The who?" Mr. Blood asked.

"The King," Mr. Fleight repeated. "The late King. Two years ago—at Goodwood, in the Royal Enclosure. I got there by giving five hundred to Colonel Murchison. And the King was yawning fit to die, watching the horses come in. And he said: 'Good Lord, what a bore

all this racing is!' And you let loose on him, and he chuckled."

"He did, did he?" Mr. Blood asked. "And you, you dirty little Jew, you were eavesdropping?"

"I was just that," Mr. Fleight said firmly. "I don't eat humble pie for it. It was what I had paid my money for. Time and again I've sat at the Royal Sports Club in an armchair with its back to yours, listening to you ragging the fools there. What do you suppose I paid my subscription there for? I hate sport. I hate racing, so what did I pay five hundred to go to Goodwood for? There were the two most distinguished persons, for me, in the whole world. And one of them was shouting a whole lot of interesting stuff at the top of his voice, and the other was chuckling as a king chuckles at a court jester. Was I to stick my fingers in my ears?"

"A true gentleman would have walked away," Mr. Blood said ironically.

"What price my five hundred then?" Mr. Fleight asked. "You chaps—true gentlemen, as you just sneered—ought to protect yourselves better. You ought not to let little Jews like me buy our way into your swellest clubs.

"That's true, too," Mr. Blood conceded peaceably. He sat reflecting for a moment. "Look here, Aaron," he produced the fruits of his cogitations, "you drop your Scotch name and call yourself not Rothwell but Rothweil—Aaron Rothweil—and hang me if I don't take you home to tea with me so as to hear the rest of your interesting recital! I want to know about you. I want to know all about you. I always want to know everything, you know. I shouldn't like to introduce you to anyone that dropped in as Fleight, when your

nose says Rothweil." He added, after a moment, with an air of making a concession that decency called for in him :

" And if I find, after consideration, that you are not a horrid little bore, or a thief, or anything—one can never know with these informal introductions—I shan't give you the cold shoulder later on. I don't mean that I shall ask you down to Corbury, but I shouldn't refuse to chat with you if I met you in Pall Mall. I can't say more than that, but I'll go so far in return for your giving yourself the trouble to walk round to my rooms. Some of the members will be coming back here, and I can't stand the look of them. They make me feel as if I were here for an improper purpose."

" But look here," Mr. Fleight said, " I don't want to waste your time. Either I'm some good or I'm none. About my antecedents."

Mr. Blood said : " Well ? "

" This is me," Mr. Fleight continued : " I was born in Pont Street, Glasgow, behind the Union Music Hall. I was brought up by a bricklayer's wife in a place called Pluckley. I was sent to the Pluckley National School till I was twelve. Then I was sent to Bludger's—taken away by I didn't know who. Then I went to St. Paul's for one term. Then I was sent to Harrow. You will observe that the person looking after me was evidently going up in the world. Then I went to Brasenose."

Mr. Blood said :

" The devil you did ! " And then : " Oh, yes, I remember, you told me. You were under my old tutor—the great Plodge."

" Yes," Mr. Fleight continued ; " that was where I learned that you were the greatest intellect of the day. Old Plodge used to talk of you. He took me up no end

—that was why he had me in to hear you talk, three nights running. He said you sounded the note of the modern world—which was not so bad for old Plodge! He used to say to me: 'Moses, though you're what you are, I'll make you a shining light of the New Jerusalem that this mighty Empire is. You shall be what Blood ought to have been, if he wasn't lazier than a buffalo and prouder than a hog.' You were up ten years before me, of course."

"Yes," Mr. Blood said reflectively, "I suppose I was poor old Plodge's pet tragedy. It makes it a sort of duty in me to give you a lift, if I'm worth anything to you—nearly broke the poor old man's heart, I did. I guess I was the only one of his hot-house blooms that did not die at least Pro-Consul. Go on with your biography."

"I took everything that any one chap could take," Mr. Fleight said, and he added modestly: "With old Plodge shoving me it wasn't any great miracle."

"I observe," Mr. Blood said, "that you spare me the list of your academic distinctions."

"What use are they to me?" Mr. Fleight retorted. "I'm a millionaire. But I ate my dinners at the Middle Temple."

"By Jove!" Mr. Blood exclaimed. He reflected, and then he added slowly: "If you come to think of it, you have every qualification for real greatness. A Scotsman, a Jew, a barrister. You know you are really Leader of the House of Commons by your triple birthright. And rich, too! And you recommend yourself to me for help, as being a hot-house shoot of poor old Plodge! Of course, I owe his unhappy ghost the reparation of helping you to do what I didn't care to do myself. Let's talk about your making a career. Good

heavens! Undoubtedly you are cut out to be the saviour of these realms in the troublous times through which we are passing."

"I think I really ought to be cut out for it," Mr. Fleight said, with great modesty in his manner.

A shabby man—it was really the clockwinder—peered in at the door, and Mr. Blood ejaculated in tones of panic:

"Here's one of the members. I can't stand this. Come along." They hurried out of the building and into Mr. Fleight's motor, which was one of the largest in this country.

. . . . . .

Mr. Blood was a singular and mysterious person to such of his world as had observed his existence. A hundred years ago he would have represented the Englishman and the gentleman. Then, the business of the world being the struggle with Napoleon, all the legions of Europe were being conducted across the campaign grounds of a continent—but exclusively by younger sons. At home in England the real Squires in their scarlet coats were tranquilly jumping over hedges in pursuit of the fox. In that age Mr. Blood would have been the commonest thing of his class and station. He would have been a "character" when all the population were characters; he would not have cared a halfpenny whether the nation was going to ruin, just as to-day he cared even less. This seemed amazing to his contemporaries.

He was, in fact, just an anachronism, and an inactive one at that. He hunted the fox, but he seldom troubled to try to be in at the death; he was very wealthy, but he made not the least use of his wealth. He did not marry; he did not sit in Parliament. He hardly entertained at all

His racing stable was so small as to be almost immaterial; his yellow and green colours were practically never seen in anything better than a small selling sweepstake. His house at Corbury, in North Kent, was big, stood in a huge park, and was moderately well appointed, but he very seldom lived in it. He gave it over to his brother Reginald, for it was part of his oddity that he should have a brother three-quarters of an hour younger than himself.

He pleased himself pretty well about the company he kept. Smart people liked him because he said caustic, outrageous or perfectly scandalous things; sober people, because of his official Radicalism. Tories approved of him because he, better than any other, could demonstrate, when he took the trouble, that the country was going to the dogs. He got more invitations than any other man in London, and he accepted some of them. He appeared to have no principle of selection.

But what attracted him more than anything to any particular set of people was an avid curiosity. If he didn't in the least desire to do anything, he was possessed by an insatiable desire to know everything that there was to know. His rooms at 22a, Burton Street, Mayfair, where he was waited on by a man who had been the son of the gamekeeper at Corbury, were lined with books, for he was a great reader. There were books about forestry, about seamanship, about the state of the army, about mining, about engineering, about the suppression of mutinies, political memoirs, social memoirs, memoirs of tramps and rogues like Carew, military biographies, and the histories of theatrical touring companies. His books, in fact, were all about "things"—solid, real things or solid, real people.

In his sitting room, on the black marble mantelshelf, there were specimens of six kinds of quartz, of the regulation army cartridges of Austria, Prussia, France, Russia and the United Kingdom. On the highly-polished, heavy, black walnut table there were hoofs of two of his favourite horses set in silver, the one serving as a pen rack, the other as an inkstand. On this table there was also a large mother-of-pearl blotting book. A smaller table near the door supported about twenty of the journals of the day, from the *Field* to the *Athenæum*, and the *Times* and *Punch* to the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Quarterly Review*. There was a still larger table beneath the windows, and here, on an embroidered and very white cloth, were laid out tea-things for six people—the tea-pot, the kettle and the jugs being of the heaviest and ugliest solid silver, dating from the year 1856. Behind the tea-things was an immense cigar-box, also of silver, a smaller cigarette-box, a silver spirit light for the cigars, and a large silver Tantalus, with square, heavy, cut-glass bottles, containing six different varieties of whisky and brandy.

It was into this room that he introduced Mr. Fleight, who felt, with his quick sense of artistic atmospheres, that he might have been back in 1860. For it was part of Mr. Blood's attitude absolutely to ignore the art, literature and furnishing of his day—though, indeed, he professed a contempt almost equally absolute for the arts of the 'sixties. But you've got to have something, as he said to Mr. Fleight, who had been moved to exclaim on entering: "How awfully complete!" These things—even these very rooms—had been his father's in his bachelor days, for Mr. Blood owned not only this house, but all the houses in Burton Street, Mayfair.

He let Mr. Fleight in, sat him down on a heavy walnut-wood chair, and then rang for his man, who occupied a room amongst the attics, and was allowed to consider the afternoons from one till half past four as his own time.

"Now you can go on with your biography," he said, planting himself before his black marble mantelshelf. "We won't smoke, if you don't mind, because some women will be coming in."

"I'd just like to know," Mr. Fleight asked, "what you've gathered from my biography hitherto?"

"I should say," Mr. Blood answered, "that you were the illegitimate son of an actress, because you have a faint tinge of the theatrical manner. Your father, I know, was Aaron Rothweil, who was probably a Jew in a small way when you were born. But as he got richer he looked after you progressively better. Then he left you all his money."

"Those are about the facts of the case," Mr. Fleight said; "but it might make things clearer if I told you that there were more romantic circumstances attaching to the matter."

"There are no such things as romantic circumstances," Mr. Blood commented. "A man's a man; a woman's a woman. And we are all odd creatures. But, of course, the odder your parents were, the better chance you have."

"That's what I was trying to bring out," Mr. Fleight continued. "My mother was Maggie Tallantyre and my father was the proverbial one Jew who ever went to Glasgow. He did not die in the workhouse because my mother lent him money and packed him off South again. But he had come down to being a scene-shifter at the music-hall before my mother picked him up."

"So your mother was Maggie Tallantyre? You're a lucky devil to have had such a clever mother!" Mr. Blood commented.

"She died about eighteen months ago," Mr. Fleight said. "She left me just over fifty thousand pounds."

"I suppose she would," Mr. Blood answered. "There was never any one like her. They used to say that the gags she put into her songs were her own gags."

"They were her own songs," Mr. Fleight asserted. "She wrote the words and she made up the tunes, and later on she even orchestrated them—when she had had time to take lessons."

"Well, well," Mr. Blood said. "Have you inherited any of her talents?"

"I like good light music," Mr. Fleight informed him. "I like good light literature; I like good pictures, and I loathe horse-racing."

"Good for you!" Mr. Blood said. "You're a paragon!"

"I don't see how that helps," Mr. Fleight enquired, "in a hopeless, inartistic country like this."

"I'll tell you how it will help," Mr. Blood exclaimed. "I understand you want to be a climber. If you're going to succeed at it you'll have to do it by backing light arts. The people who make your reputation nowadays are the cheap novelists, the cheap journalists —any kind of cheap talker who will talk about you in return for meals in marble halls. You can't do it by going racing. This is a democratic age and racing is played out. The way you rise nowadays is through the bookstalls."

"I know," Mr. Fleight said. "That was why I dropped Colonel Murchison."

"And that, I suppose, is why Murchison cut his

throat ? " Mr. Blood commented. " I thought it was because he had taken your forty pieces of silver."

" Oh, Lord, no ! " Mr. Fleight answered. " He'd had a couple of thousand from me, and he thought he was going to make it fifty. But the chaps he introduced to me weren't the least good to me. They thirsted for my money and what my money could buy. I tried about six months of them—took a shoot down in Hants and another in Scotland, and let Murchison ask parties down for me. Of course, I'm a dead shot, but it bored me—it bored me crazy. I'm a plus man at golf, too—and that bores me dead. And that sort of man—I can't listen to his sort of talk and they won't listen to mine. And I couldn't see where Murchison's men were going to lead me. I don't want to own a Derby winner. Think of the boredom of it ! Of course, his getting me into the Royal Box at Goodwood was worth the five hundred I paid him for it, because I overheard your conversation, and that gave me the sort of idea of a life that I shouldn't be like a fish out of water in—though I believe what would suit me best would be to sell second-hand clothes over the counter. But of course, I can't do that. Anyhow, I told Murchison I was going to drop sport and he went and cut his throat. Pigeons were getting so deuced scarce."

" And a good job, too," Mr. Blood commented. He stood reflecting for a moment or two. " What was it I said to the late King ? " he asked at last. " I don't want the whole of it, but just a pointer—the thing that impressed you."

" It was when you said that the last action recorded in the history of modern civilisation—the last action that was worthy of a gentleman—was when your ancestor stole the Crown jewels. Then the King chuckled."

"Oh, I remember now," Mr. Blood said. "I'd lost my temper. He had just said to me: 'What a confounded bore all this racing is!'—and he really felt it, poor dear! But what the deuce did it matter to me if this country is given up to advertising agents and if the Throne is the worst agency of the lot? What else did I say? How far did I go?"

"I should say you went a long way," Mr. Fleight answered. "You told him that he was just an advertising agent for the Crown; that he lay awake all night inventing spontaneous acts of graciousness and bored himself to death all day in the effort to appear like a sportsman, sticking over the front of the Royal Box with a white hat and a twenty-five shilling cigar. And you went on and on and he kept on laughing."

"Well, I must have been in the vein, that day," Mr. Blood said. "I'd forgotten all about it."

"I suppose," Mr. Fleight said meditatively, "you really are something tremendous?"

"Oh, tremendous!" Mr. Blood said. "The only thing of my kind left in the world. Like the last mastodon. I sit and think what would happen if I really got up and moved. But nothing would happen. There would be a conspiracy of silence; the halfpenny papers would not mention it, as they do not mention the chap who stole the Irish insignia. They would not mention my ancestor nowadays. You heard how I strangled the groom at Newport, Rhode Island—strangled him with these two hands that you see? Well, none of the papers mentioned that achievement, and yet that is about all I am fit for."

Mr. Fleight ventured to ask how Mr. Blood had got out of it.

"Oh, that was the most extraordinary fun," he got his answer. "The sort of fun that makes you vomit. I went over there for the Horse Show with a team of bays—these are hoofs of the leaders on the table. Pretty decent horses, and I was fond of the leaders. A considerable deal better than anything that they had got against them. And Lord Despion bribed my stud groom to dope my team on the night before the judging. I wasn't spying on the groom. I just went into the stable after the horses were finished off for the night to see how they took their feeds. And I ran my hand through the oats and I noticed that they were very dusty. So I called Jenkins, the groom, and asked him what the devil he meant by not getting better stuff. And he went purple and puffy and then green. And by God, I stuck my fingers in my mouth and that dust tasted sweetish and saltish! Bromides! And then I got Jenkins by the throat. He had been in my service ever since he could stand—as faithful as the day. His people had been in my village for four hundred and fifty years. He'd have laid down his life for me, I daresay I know he would have. But a thousand dollars had been too much for him. A thousand dollars! He valued them more than the life he'd have laid down for me. You see, that's it—loyalty, faithful service, devotion to the credit of your horses, they all go for a thousand dollars. I got it out of him with my hands on his neck. Despion had paid him the money at the instance of Vanderput and Guggenhonk, who were showing a team against mine. I found out afterwards that Despion had had five thousand, and had only given that poor devil one. And Despion was the brother-in-law of the Chairman of the Pittsville and South Connecticut Railway Combine, and the cousin of the American

Ambassador, and the second cousin of the President's wife's sister's husband—all by marriage, of course. And Vanderput and Guggenhonk were brothers-in-law of two British peers, and nominated all the officials of five states between them. So I strangled Jenkins and walked out into the grounds of the Casino; and I said to every blessed person I met—and Despion and Vanderput and Guggenhonk were there—I said:

"'I've strangled my groom. Now you go and put me in the electric chair.' D'you think they'd arrest me? D'you think any single person would arrest me? Heavens, no! The aristocracy of two empires and five states stood against it, and the world of American sport and God knows what. I was drugged and in a state-room of an ancient cattle-liner bound for the Cape before sundown, and the groom was found in the harbour, and they decided that he had fallen in in a state of intoxication—a man that was the leader of the Corbury Band of Hope. Isn't that a funny, filthy tale? Isn't it the moral of the life we lead? Don't you see why I can't get to action?"

"Because you'd have to strangle more grooms?" Mr. Fleight asked.

"Just that," his host answered. "In this world to-day, if you want to make a career you have to see twenty-fifth barons get five thousand and grooms one. And you have to strangle the grooms. And I don't like strangling grooms. I like 'em too much. That's my story, and I tell it to you, the first time I tell it, because I'm hanged if I don't believe that you, the bastard brat of a Scotch music-hall singer and a Frankfort soap-boiler, are about the only person in this country who can understand my emotions over it." He paused, and then he said: "Now do you understand

my emotions? Just you tell me. I'll let it be a test question."

Mr. Fleight considered cautiously for a moment.

"I'm not going to say," he said at last, "that I share your emotions, because I don't. But I think you feel it like this. If your horses had been racers that you had just bought, and if your groom had been just any jockey that you had employed to bring off heavy money, you would not have minded. That's the normal state of the Turf. And there's nothing very particular about ordinary doping in the United States. You don't object to that; it makes things more picturesque."

Mr. Blood nodded his head.

"But when it comes," Mr. Fleight continued, "to a groom who has lived with you all his life doping horses that have lived with him all his life, and nice horses that you are fond of and are in the competition for their own credit—so as to look fine, and smart, and all the nice things that horses can look—and when that groom gives them, not poison to kill them, but bromides to make them look dull and heavy and stumble, and just does it for a thousand dollars——"

"Go on," Mr. Blood said.

"A thousand dollars is such a nasty sum, appealing to such a petty imagination. Not enough to set a groom up in an hotel, and too much to get a drink with. He should have taken a five pound note or twelve thousand pounds—nothing between; that would have made it a wantonness or a crime, and you'd have stood it with equanimity. But that this should be an age when a man will betray the nice horses that ought to be like his own children—democracy and education and that sort of sneakiness being the coin of the realm—that was what you could not stand."

" You phrase it too sentimentally," Mr. Blood said. " A horse, for instance, is too decent a beast to be called ' nice ' by any man. But that is, roughly speaking, what I have felt."

Mr. Fleight nodded his head sagely.

" At the same time," he said, " I ought, perhaps, to tell you that I find this age a great deal more bearable than you do. I prefer the misdemeanour of doping a horse for two hundred pounds to the crime of pulling for a fiver. It's less picturesque, but it's quieter. I'd, in fact, rather live among thieves like company promoters than amongst gentlemen like your ancestor who stole the Crown jewels and was afterwards, I believe, executed for trying to kidnap the Lord Chancellor —something of the sort."

" Oh, I've quite realised that," Mr. Blood said. " You are a child of the age, if you're not yet certain to be the father of the age to come."

There sounded upon the outer door three sharp thumps that must have been made with a stick. Mr. Blood listened, and then remarked :

" Go on with your biography. Those are the people who are coming to tea."

" The point is," Mr. Fleight remarked, " that I'm not an illegitimate son at all."

" Oh, there was a Scotch marriage ? " Mr. Blood asked.

The knocking was repeated more insistently, but Mr. Blood did not move.

" Isn't someone going to let them in ? " Mr. Fleight asked.

" No," his host answered, " they're only some literary people. They'll go away and come back again."

" But still," Mr. Fleight expostulated politely, " don't let me——"

"Go on," Mr. Blood said peremptorily. "They live in the rooms above. I'll send for them when I want them."

"The real romance," Mr. Fleight went on, "was not the Scotch marriage. The point about it was that my mother knew that they had got married in the silly, accidental way you can in Scotland. My father didn't. And she kept it secret from him—so as not to worry him—nearly all the days of her life. And one day, when he was a childless widower of seventy—and a dignified old Hebrew at that—my father sent her a polite note—they had not met for thirty years—to say that he would like to see her. And she had out her terrific old landau and went round in state. And then he made her a formal speech to the effect that he owed the whole of his career to her and that, just as soon as not, he'd marry her. Then she said:

"'Aaron my boy, you were caught bang up
Forty years ago . . .'

Those were the words of her famous song in the eighties. I, you see, was just the legitimate heir to the soap works and the millions, and Palatial Hall, at Hampstead, where I reign now that my father is gathered to his fathers."

Mr. Blood took up a long pole. It was used for opening the upper windows as a rule. He remarked: "Oh, well," and vigorously prodded the ceiling.

"It's about time," he said, "that I introduced you to some people that may be useful to you."

"Then you mean—— " Mr. Fleight was beginning.

"I mean," Mr. Blood was saying, "to try an experiment. I've had it in my mind a long time—just the way a man like you *might* climb. I've speculated upon it often—you can't get away from it in these days

when the chief characteristic of Society is the multitude of climbers—so that it might amuse me. And at the same time I don't find you an unamusing companion. You've got low tastes but a good intelligence. I don't promise anything much, but I'll bear-lead you for a bit. Of course, I want my price. You always get a price for social introductions. And my price is that you should do something pretty considerable for some young people that I am interested in."

"I'll do anything in the world," Mr. Fleight cut in.

"That's good," Mr. Blood said. "The fact is that I ought to do it myself, but I'm too lazy. Of course, if you help them, they'll help you. You'll help them with quite extraordinary generosity and they'll ingenuously chant your generosity in just the places where you will need advertisement. That's the beginning of my scheme for you."

"Well, I'm entirely in your hands," Mr. Fleight brought out. "Absolutely."

"Then tell me," Mr. Blood asked, "exactly what your income is."

"I don't know," Mr. Fleight answered; "not exactly."

Mr. Blood asked him patiently whether it was nearer £100,000 or £500,000 a year. Mr. Fleight supposed that it was certainly nearer £100,000. He proposed that they should put it at that.

"Then it's not enough," Mr. Blood answered. "It's enough to make a start with, but I should not wonder if I had to send you back into business. I suppose you could extend the soap works or juggle with stock if you wanted to?"

"I suppose I could," Mr. Fleight said. "I should not object. But what's all the money wanted for?"

"My dear man," Mr. Blood said, "if you're going to go up at all fast as a climber it's going to cost you £150,000 a year for sheer bribery. You'll have to take up politics, and the party funds will cost you about £40,000 every two or three years—every time there is a general election, at least. You will have to run a daily paper in order to boom yourself with the general public, and you can't lose less than £60,000 a year on that. You will have to run a serious monthly or weekly to advertise you to thinking people—another £5,000. You will have to have a constituency with a solid 2,000 majority, and that will cost you about £2 per vote per annum—say £7,000. You will have to have an expensive wife for the social side of things; her establishment charges will run you into at least £12,000 if you do the thing at all decently."

"I say," Mr. Fleight ejaculated, "I daresay I could find the money, but I don't see that I can do with a wife."

"You've got to have her," Mr. Blood said calmly. "Someone blonde and large and showy. Someone of a decidedly Germano-Christian type to take away from your Hebrew appearance, which would damage you with other Hebrews in Society."

"I don't see how it can be done," Mr. Fleight said. "I really don't."

"Of course," Mr. Blood exclaimed, with a really tyrannous note in his voice, "you've got a woman living with you that you've got to be faithful to. I know all about it. She'll cut her throat if you marry. Your sort of chap always does have that sort of thing tacked on to him, and she's always going to cut her throat. She never does, you know."

"I don't know about that," Mr. Fleight said.

"I know," Mr. Blood retorted, "you want to be honourable and keep your word. It's very creditable, and a pretty penny it's going to cost you as you go through life. This woman's installed at Palatial Hall, isn't she?"

Mr. Fleight made affirmatory noises and Mr. Blood went on:

"That's like a chap like you. Well, you'll give that place to the lady. It makes you look ridiculous anyhow to have such an exhibition to live in. And you'll find that Palatial Hall and £3,000 a year will do wonders to protect the lady's throat from the fatal knife. I'll tell you all about where you'll live and how, another day. Here are your fellow conspirators."

## II

MR. MITCHELL and the Misses Macphail had ascended the broad, dark, steep and turning staircase of Mr. Blood's house, where Mr. Mitchell lived rent free because Mr. Blood liked him, since he was a gentle stylist and exactly not the sort of person Mr. Blood was supposed to wish to know. Mr. Mitchell had thumped on a door on the third story with his bog-oak stick. They stood in silence. No answer rewarded the second series of thumps.

"Anæmic!" Mr. Mitchell exclaimed.

"Now what do you mean by that?" the younger Miss Macphail asked; she had a strongly noticeable though very slight German accent.

"No Blood there!" Mr. Mitchell explained. "That's a joke, that is."

"I call it a rodden choke," Miss Macphail exclaimed. She was much larger and even more blonde than her sister, and her German accent was heavier and more threatening.

"Well, I'm not a humourist," Mr. Mitchell answered. He was a fair, plump man of thirty-two and always wore blue serge that, as a rule, was well brushed but shiny at the elbows and the shoulder-blades, because he was generally sprawling in an armchair. "I am a serious novelist of good family, who makes a living by writing paragraphs for the halfpenny papers."

"And rodden batly you do it!" Miss Macphail exclaimed. "I've more than half a mint to chug you."

Mr. Mitchell winced slightly. Then he affected cheerfulness and exclaimed :

" Oh, well, we can't discuss earthquakes before the door of Blood. You'd better come up to my rooms and wait till he hits the ceiling. There's only Cluny there."

" We ought to haf corn back to the office after lunch," Miss Macphail replied. " All this is waste of time."

They were all three of them engaged on the staff of a journal called the *Halfpenny Weekly*, which, indeed, Miss Macphail edited with efficiency and determination, and, it being a Friday, when the paper had gone to press, Mr. Mitchell had taken the two young ladies to lunch at a Soho restaurant—which he could not afford to do—and had afterwards persuaded them to come and have tea with Mr. Blood. But during the whole of the modest festival Miss Macphail had grumbled that they ought not to have gone so far away from the office for lunch, and that they ought to go back to the office. She regarded Mr. Mitchell as a fool for paying for their lunches when he could not afford it, and this had made her the more determined to discharge Mr. Mitchell from the *Halfpenny Weekly*.

They mounted another weary flight of stairs and arrived at a door that was exactly over Mr. Blood's, but it was smaller and in a lower and darker corridor. This Mr. Mitchell opened with a latch-key, but he barred the ladies' entrance whilst he called :

" Hullo, Cluny. I've got the Mitchell girls with me."

The answer came to them in a voice strikingly high :

" All right, come in. I'm writing a sonnet. I'm strictly decent, though not attractive."

They entered a small room. It contained many books, a great deal of blotting paper, Chinese embroidered

silks, Japanese kakimonos, bits of sculptured marble, old clocks, tobacco-tins, and innumerable cigarette ends. The room resembled a battle ground, where opposing forces marched the one upon the other; it was difficult to tell where the territory of the books began, or the chinoiseries ended. Indeed, upon one straw chair there lay six large brown volumes and two pieces of Chinese embroidered silk, whilst someone had upset half a tin of yellow tobacco over the chairful.

In a vivid scarlet kimono Mr. Cluny Macpherson, with his slightly bald head, his almond eyes, and his high features, was sitting on a red lacquered umbrella-stand, which he tilted towards an immense sheet of blotting paper in a cleared space on the large round table. He did not look up, but exclaimed in a high voice:

"It's an awful bore, you people coming in! I was just finishing the sestett." And, indeed, he was writing in an extremely minute hand upon a large sheet of blue foolscap.

"There's an awful lot of waste of time goes on in this place," Miss Macphail said. But no one else spoke, for they were watching the delicate, oriental face of Cluny.

He snatched up, after a moment of time, his sheet of paper and, holding it by one corner at about two feet from his eyes, tilting himself back on his umbrella-stand, he began to read in a high, ecstatic voice, and with a slightly idiotic romance expressed in his long features:

"Kwang Su, intent on virginal assaults,
Goes, paper-lanthorn shaking through the night;
The something——"

He interrupted himself to say:

"I haven't got an adjective for the sky. But it doesn't matter," and continued:

> "The tum-tum sky, inlaid with opals bright,
> Inveighs him to his green ancestral vaults.
> The crimson dragons and the smelling salts——"

He broke off to say, with a melancholy intonation:

"It's really awfully fine! It would have beaten 'The Lament of Hang,' if you hadn't interrupted me. Have some lychees. Have some absinthe." He ran his hand round his chin. "I've got to shave. I can't go to the Countess's like this. And I've got to go to Princess Odintsov's at 6.15. She's weaving a crown of laurels for me."

He trotted behind a Chinese screen at the right-hand corner of the room, and they heard him pouring out water.

"You'd better take me with you to the Countess's," Miss Macphail called over the screen. His voice answered: "Oh, dear!" in terms of hopeless lamentation.

"You'd better," Miss Macphail said grimly.

"But you won't let me read my poems," the voice continued pitiably. "You can't stand my poems."

"Oh, I can stand half an hour of them," she replied. "Not more."

"Then why won't you ever print them in the *Halfpenny Weekly*?" Macpherson countered her. "This soap won't lather. I can't think what Mitchell's done with the shaving soap."

"That was an office sample," Mr. Mitchell said. "It had to be sent back because Augusta wouldn't let me put in a three line puff about it."

"They don't get a three line puff in my paper under thirty-one and six," Miss Macphail told him. "You

shouldn't have used the sample before you knew they would pay it. It has meant no end of correspondence with the makers. I can't have the office upset like this. I shall have to give you the chuck, Charlie."

"You can't do that, Augusta," Mr. Mitchell said. "I've got a year's contract."

"Oh, that was only over the telephone," Miss Macphail replied. "I never engage anybody any other way. So your contract isn't worth the twopence it cost you at the public telephone."

"Oh, that's rot!" Mr. Mitchell said, but his aspect was one of deep alarm. His livelihood—or at any rate, all the pleasures of it—depended on the caprices of this lady. He had an income of about £75 a year from his father's trustees, and Mr. Blood let him live rent free. They were, indeed, connected through their common cousin, Countess Cornwall—but that was all he had to live on.

"It isn't rod!" Miss Macphail said. "And it occurs to me that as I've got to give you a cholly coot tressing town, I may as well gif you a cholly coot tressing town at once."

Miss Macphail was noticeably, was peachily, fair. She was tall and slightly plump, in a German fashion, though, eccentrically enough, her father had been a Scotsman. She had been born twenty-seven years before in the village of East Dutenhofen, in Southern Prussia. Her father had been one of several unfortunates who had tried to make a living out of Germany by giving lessons in the English language. He had set up a language bureau in that remote province, hoping to proceed in the end to Berlin. But all his life had been taken up in giving English conversation lessons in one or other small German town. He would

give three lessons in Schiffenberg on a Monday ; five in Arnsburg on a Tuesday ; eleven in Klosterau, where the University is, on a Wednesday. The number of the lessons varied from year to year, but during the whole of his career they had averaged about six a day, and his average fees had been about one shilling a lesson. And since he had married the daughter of the pastor of Dutenhofen when he was twenty-four, and since he had two daughters very early, and since he had to pay his travelling expenses over a territory of about a hundred miles square that he travelled weekly, he did not do very well, more particularly as he had to keep himself decent. Indeed, the first thing that Augusta could remember was sitting on the doorstep of the Dutenhofen home at sunset, in a small pair of boy's knickerbockers, with her hair in little golden pigtails, behind the rampart of her father's dunghill in the street beneath the tall black and white houses—watching the pigs come home, led by a swineherd who blew a wooden horn ; and the goats who followed a herd with a bugle ; the sheep with a whistle, and the geese following a tall, dirty, blonde girl with amazingly pale hair, who swung a watchman's rattle to keep them together.

That was Augusta's earliest reminiscence. Later, she had lugged an old cow by a rope out to the patches of pasture beside the green river Hain. But that is not to say that she had become one of the common people. Her father was a Macphail, her mother a pastor's daughter, and she spoke German of an extreme correctness. She had also been very well educated.

Her father spoke, of course, Scottish of so barbarous a kind that no English person ever understood more than two words uttered by his pupils or by Augusta herself. Nevertheless, in virtue of her linguistic accomplishments

Augusta had been taken as an improver by the great firm of Glogenau, Court Dressmakers, of Frankfort. She had to show off the dresses to English Jewesses visiting their relations in the birthplace of their race.

She had inspired old Mr. Glogenau, the head of the firm, with an unholy and quite immoral passion; nevertheless, she contrived, as she expressed it to her mother, to keep herself virtuous, and she used her leverage to get her younger sister into the business.

Later, she had persuaded Mr. Glogenau to send her to London to keep the business in touch with their English clients, and she had never returned to Germany. She was marvellous in persuading the English clients to buy clothes they did not need—her blondeness and her German accent made all the Jewesses from Bayswater to Park Lane itself as wax in her hands. Besides, they loved to get their clothes from Frankfort, the cradle of their race, where clothes were a little dearer, but how very much more striking than those from Paris!

She had got into touch with the English shops. And then, on one deathless day, she had walked into the office of the *Woman of Fashion*, and had demanded that the proprietors should let her write fashion articles. She took their breaths away. She declared that half the dress and corset makers in the West End had definitely promised to advertise in any paper that employed her. It was, as she said, a striking example of the "bower of the Chew" in our civilisation—the shopkeepers who had made her that promise were thinking of her connection with the ladies of that race.

She had got the job of writing the articles; she had asked for no very great pay, but she had made the fortune of the paper. She brought it in thirteen pages of advertisement a week, and she did not ask for commission.

Nevertheless, she supported in Germany her father, who had gone mad, her mother, who did her best by peasant work to keep expenses down, and her sister, whom she had taken away from Glogenau's because Wilhelmina was timid and found it difficult to resist the advances of the proprietor. She had even given Wilhelmina the opportunity of an education in drawing at the Frankfort City night schools, which are the best in the world; and at last she had brought her sister over from Germany and took her about with her to draw the models in the shops that she intended to write about. Thus Wilhelmina almost supported herself.

Augusta, in short, was honest, industrious, filial, virtuous, and immensely determined. She led the life of a slave and she flourished because she never refrained from asking for what could be of use to her. When the proprietors of the *Woman of Fashion* determined to start the *Halfpenny Weekly*, Augusta simply demanded the editorship. It was to be written by women for women, and the proprietors, in spite of her German accent, gave her the job. She could write quite good enough English for their clients, they found—her articles were actually written by Mr. Mitchell, whom she had met in a tea-shop in Fleet Street—and the shops just simply loved her. So there, at the moment, she was—still extremely poor, with many demands on her, but valiant and as hard as chilled steel.

On that afternoon she was wearing her cheap black dress. It had been made by a French Jewess at Clapham, Miss Macphail having bought the black mohair material at an auction sale at the top of Bedford Street for five and sevenpence and the dressmaker having made it up from a drawing by Wilhelmina of a model from Poiret—the making costing eleven and six, including

braid and sundries. And she wore the dress with an air of being fitted into it as an umbrella-case fits an umbrella, and of having nothing whatever beneath it. She had a black hat of chip straw, about the size of an ordinary pudding basin, that could not conceal all her soft, blonde hair. And that was all there was to her, except a pair of *glacé* shoes and black and scarlet, very open-work stockings.

She stood with her legs as wide apart as her skirt would let her and, with her hands behind her back, her soft, lisping accent, and her hard glance, she dressed Mr. Mitchell down.

"You're an incorrigibly idle, useless waster," she began. "You can't write for nuts."

"Oh, I say!" Mr. Mitchell said; "everyone knows that I'm a stylist."

"You can't write short, snappy paragraphs for nuts," Miss Macphail repeated. "You may write elegies, or reviews, or that sort of stuff all right. I don't know anything about that." She told him that he had to earn his living and he didn't. His notes about furniture shops were no goot—no goot at all. His social paragraphs would not excite a suburban policeman. His Paris notes were copied from the *Daily Telegraph* three weeks late and would not take in an A.B.C. girl. His "Round the Shops" did not bring in a guinea a week. The advertisers did not like him. How could they? They could not understand half the things he said. "You're utterly no use to me," she concluded. "You're no use to the paper. You're no use at all, and I pay you £3 a week. You've just got to quit."

Mr. Macpherson said plaintively from behind the screen:

" I wish one of you would come and see if I'm properly shaved and if my ties go with my socks. Since Charles used the looking-glass for pounding sugar on, one can't in the least see what one looks like."

The younger Miss Macphail, who had never spoken yet, went round the corner of the screen, and they could hear her whispering kindly to Cluny.

Mr. Mitchell sat down upon the lacquered umbrella-stand and gazed in front of him into vacancy.

" I suppose you realise that it's black ingratitude, Augusta," he said half ironically.

" It's business," she answered briefly. " Don't you be an ass, Charlie. I've got to get on and the paper's got to pay. You've had three pounds a week for twenty-seven weeks, and that's been good enough for an incapable like you."

Mr. Mitchell accepted the inevitable in a half jesting spirit. He teased Augusta, who had no sense of humour whatever, by begging her, with an imitated pathos, to let him write her a column called : " Men's Fashions for Married Women." He said it was the one essential for a woman's paper. Women ought to know when their husbands were well dressed, because it helped them in their careers. He cited instances from among his own relatives. There was his brother-in-law, the Hon. Hugh Ives. He was separated from his wife because she told him he was too fat to wear white boot-tops and check waistcoats when every man in town just had to wear white boot-tops and check waistcoats. Of course they had not actually separated over that. But that was how the quarrel had begun. There was also his cousin, Trevor——

Miss Macphail interrupted him to ask what he was trying to get at.

"Just you let me," Mr. Mitchell answered, "write my column of men's fashions, and I may be able to get a pair of evening trousers by puffing some tailor." He said that all his trousers were too old. If he got a quite new pair he might be able to fascinate some heiress. He was going to eleven balls in the best houses during the next fortnight.

Miss Macphail looked at him with a glance in which were mingled contempt for his powers of attraction and contempt for his humour which she did not understand.

"You are talking rod!" she remarked.

But Mr. Mitchell continued to say that if he could engage in male journalism instead of woman's, it might give him a certain commanding air that would appeal more to the opposite sex than had been the case hitherto.

The boards trembled beneath Miss Macphail's feet, and there was a sound of drumming from below.

"That's Blood," Mr. Mitchell said. "He's calling us down to tea. Come along Cluny; come along girls."

On the floor below, Mr. Blood was just accepting the unquestioning submission of Mr. Fleight, when the quiet of the room was invaded by the voice of Cluny Macpherson. He had run down in advance of the others in order to explain:

"I say you fellows, I've finished a most splendid sonnet. I had better read it to you at once, because I've got to go on to the Princess's at 6.15."

He pulled the large sheet of blue foolscap out of his pocket, unfolded it, and began at once:

"Kwang Su, intent on virginal assaults——"

His voice went on and on in a very high key.

"It's no use," Miss Macphail continued with Mr. Mitchell the wrangle that had accompanied them down the staircase. "You must take a week's notice. I can't bother about your trousers."

Mr. Blood introduced the younger Miss Macphail—Miss Wilhelmina—to Mr. Fleight. When he spoke of her his voice had a kind intonation, but he was aloof enough to all the others.

"The two young men," he was beginning, but the voice of Mr. Macpherson became so high with excitement when he reached the words:

"Inveighs him to his green ancestral vaults——"

that Mr. Blood had to begin again:

"The two young men you may look upon as excellent representatives of literary and dilettante London of the present day. Mr. Macpherson, as you can hear, is a poet; Mr. Mitchell is a prose stylist. You can take it from me that he is quite excellent. Isn't he, Miss Wilhelmina?"

"Atmirable!" Miss Wilhelmina exclaimed.

"And Miss Wilhelmina," Mr. Blood continued, "is an admirable artist. She draws all the fashion plates, designs all the head and tail pieces, the covers and most of the fancy advertisements of the periodical called the *Halfpenny Weekly.*" He went on to explain that the *Halfpenny Weekly* was a magnificent periodical, a thorough type of the civilization of to-day. It brought in for its proprietors, so he said, rather over fifteen thousand a year, and the editorial expenses were about ten pounds a week. Mr. Mitchell, the stylist, received three pounds ten a week for writing the whole paper. Miss Wilhelmina received one pound ten for acting as art editor, as he had already related. The sub-editor

received twenty-five shillings weekly and put in her unoccupied time as an advertisement canvasser, receiving no commission.

Mr. Macpherson, who had ceased for a moment, began again :

" Now, here's another poem that I am going to read to the Princess and Countess Paramatti :

> " The enamelled copper of Ho Pi San's lawns
> Reverberates with tinkles of the lute——"

He continued to read, throwing back his head, half-closing his eyes and having upon his olive face an expression of ecstatic delight. Miss Macphail, with Mr. Mitchell beside her, was pouring out the tea in a business-like manner.

" I'll tell you what I'll do, Charlie," she said. " If you'll introduce me to your aunt, the Duchess of Essex, and if she consents to write an article for the paper for nothing, I'll pay you what I should have paid her—twenty-five shillings."

" Miss Macphail," Mr. Blood continued, " who has built up that remarkable periodical, guides it, edits it for three pounds fifteen, having, in spite of obvious difficulties with the language, sprung at one bound into a position at the summit of British journalism."

" But three pounds fifteen a week ! " Mr. Fleight said.

" Oh, that's about current rates for an editor to-day," Mr. Blood answered. " Of course, someone will be coming along and trying to bribe her away from her present employers. She'll be able to get eight or nine times as much soon. That's why I want to secure her at once. She will be offered a position at ten pounds a week this afternoon, and she will stick out for fifteen."

" How the devil do you know all these things ? " Mr. Fleight said ; " you've never been a journalist."

"Oh, I know everything," Mr. Blood answered off-handedly.

"So he does," Miss Wilhelmina chorussed. "He's a most diabolical person. I'm positively always afraid of him."

"As for you," Mr. Blood looked at her, "you're not going to be worked to death any more. You're going to have a nice room with north and top lights, and you're going to do just exactly what you like in the way of drawing, and you're going to have your mother over from Germany, and you're going to keep house for your sister until you make a rich marriage and become a leader of society. That's how we're going to arrange your little fairy tale."

"What heavenly things!" Miss Wilhelmina said in a tone of rapture.

"Oh, I'm not your fairy prince," Mr. Blood said. "Here he is," and he touched Mr. Fleight on the shoulder. "This is Mr. Rothweil, the soap-boiler."

Miss Wilhelmina, her eyes enormous with gratitude and wonder, clasped her hands in a position of German sentiment and exclaimed to Mr. Blood:

'Oh, you dear man! Oh, I always knew you would do something for us." And then she turned quickly upon Mr. Fleight. "Is it really true?" she asked. "Is that what you are really going to do? And are you really the great Mr. Rothweil? I thought he was a much older man?"

"You perceive," Mr. Blood remarked to Mr. Fleight, "how being Mr. Rothweil places you. It's better than being a duke because no one in the world knows whether any given duke, except one or two, has twopence to his name. But every one in the world knows Rothweil's Soap."

"That's extraordinarily true," Miss Wilhelmina exclaimed; and then she asked coaxingly again whether Mr. Fleight was really going to do what Mr. Blood had said.

"I suppose I am," Mr. Fleight answered. "I almost certainly am. Mr. Blood asked me to do something for some friends, and as you seem to be those friends, that's what I am going to do. I perceive that he knows so exactly how things are—because I had never looked upon the name of Rothweil as an asset—that if he said I was going to buy all the animals in the Zoo and let them loose on Wimbledon Common, you might take it that that would be exactly what I should be going to do."

Miss Macphail, coming from the tea-table with Mr. Mitchell behind her, had already provided Mr. Macpherson with a cup of tea. He retained it in his hand whilst he continued to read, and she approached Mr. Fleight with his cup.

"If you take sugar," she remarked to him, without deigning to look at him, "you will have to go and get it;" and then she said to Mr. Blood: "I've given Charlie Mitchell the chug."

"Oh, well," Mr. Blood answered, "he'll be giving you a job this afternoon. It's all right; his star has risen. But I should advise you, if you want to appear really English, to say not 'the chug,' but the 'giddy mitten.' It sounds so much more English to be thoroughly American."

Miss Macphail had listened to the latter part of this speech with irritation. It seemed to her that the great defect of England as a country was that people spoke too much and indulged in a silly facetiousness when they ought to stick to business.

"What's all this?" she exclaimed in a hard voice.

"What's this about Charlie Mitchell?" And then she called out: "Come here, Charlie. What have you been keeping up your sleeve?"

"If you could only silence Mr. Macpherson," Mr. Blood said, "I could tell you all about it."

"Oh, shut up!" Miss Macphail called to Cluny, who was still reading on; "you are an infernal nuisance!"

"I'm just coming to an end," Mr. Macpherson mumbled. He waved his tea-cup perilously in the air upon its saucer, whilst he held the foolscap close to his eyes. "I can't read just this word. It looks as if part of it might be 'perambulator.' No, that's it.

> "Oh, tintinnabulating porphyry fonts!
> Fonts where Lo Sin has drunk and gazed!
> Oh, lotus tree and shivering bulbul, glazed
> By mists of verdigris! oh, amber ponts
> Oh——"

"And that's as far as I've got," he exclaimed. He took a hasty sip from his cup, put it down on a chair, and folded up his manuscript, exclaiming: "I knew a man called Nuttall who had an awfully ugly mother. Now I must go to the Princess." He ran out of the room.

Miss Macphail exclaimed:

"Here you, stop! You're going to take me to the Princess's with you," just as Mr. Blood cried:

"Stop him! he's the greatest gossip in London. He's exactly the man we want."

They made Mr. Macpherson return by dragging him back by the coat tails and he had to listen to the scheme for a new periodical that was to be edited by Mr. Mitchell and paid for by Mr. Fleight.

## III

MR. CLUNY MACPHERSON and Miss Macphail walked side by side to the Pocahontas Club, for Mr. Macpherson, though he was quite a wealthy young man, thought that taxi-cabs were terribly extravagant, whilst Miss Macphail, since her arrival in London, had never so much as once contributed a coin to such a means of getting about. The Pocahontas Club was, moreover, only just round the corner, in Piccadilly.

Cluny had therefore no time to get out more than a bubbling string of ejaculations.

"God bless my soul! Isn't it perfectly extraordinary! Isn't it amazing!" he commented on the fact just revealed to him, that a new magazine, to be conducted by Charles Mitchell, was about to be launched, and that Miss Augusta was to be his assistant. "You've got your opportunity now. Do you suppose Charlie will publish any of my poems?" But then he supposed that Mitchell detested his poems. He asked next if it wasn't an exciting world, and stated that he knew a man called Huxtep who went to Bogota, in the Republic of Costaguana, for the purpose of establishing the religion of Minerva instead of the Roman Church. "What an important person you are going to be, Augusta!" he exclaimed, so shrilly that the crossing sweeper at Little Grosvenor Street followed them for some minutes with his eyes. "You're going to be assistant editor of the most important magazine the world has ever seen. That man Rothweil will pour

money like blood or water, and Charlie Mitchell will assemble the most wonderful collection of cranks known to this earth. And, of course, it's cranks that get a thing a reputation in the intellectual world!" He went on to say that he hadn't thought it quite right to introduce Miss Macphail to the Princess before, but that now it was perfectly all right and that Augusta need not be in the least alarmed. She could go anywhere; he would take the responsibility of that. Miss Macphail did not offer any comments on Cluny's speeches, but walked rather grimly beside him. She determined that whatever poetry the new magazine might print—and she did not give two pins for any poetry that was not by Goethe or at least by Freiligrath—no single verse by Cluny Macpherson should ever appear in its pages.

The Pocahontas Club, an immense building which had been erected for the residence of the late Duke of Granville, was mainly visited by women who wrote and upon the whole it despised the frivolous or the merely clubbable. It contained, however, many residential suites. One of these was inhabited by the Princess Odintsov, who had as a companion the Countess Paramatti. The Princess had some grievance against the Russian Government and she was understood to hope that the British Foreign Office would interest itself in her case, which, since she was a Russian subject, proved a slow process. The Countess Paramatti had once been very rich, but she had a grievance against the Republic of Brazil, or she was fomenting a revolution. These ladies, in spite of their distinguished origins, were exceedingly impoverished, so that it was understood that Mr. Macpherson, who was the soul of goodness, paid for his tea. He also discharged their bills whenever he had read his poems to them, though he

did this unobtrusively when, on his way out, he passed the porter in his glass case beside the club door.

They were seated in one corner of a room whose main characteristics were its vastness and the fact that the electric light was very tiring to the eyes. Several groups were not far from them, because there was a certain exhilaration to be derived from sitting at a table next, or next but one, to a real princess, with a countess thrown in. Mr. Macpherson appeared. He was walking behind Augusta Macphail, who, in turn, walked behind a boy in buttons. The greater number of the members rose from their tables and went to others further off.

This was done partly out of respect, since many of the more humble members regarded Mr. Macpherson as being, in a sort of a way, the prime minister, or at the least the court jester, of a royal lady. Many of the members, too, detested hearing Mr. Macpherson read his own poems.

The Princess, a tall and extraordinarily beautiful, dark lady, spoke practically no English. But she was able to assure Mr. Macpherson, in French, that she adored his poems for their rhythm. The higher notes of his voice reminded her, she told him, of the chants of the Cossacks of the Don. The Countess Paramatti, a short, squat figure with a remarkable moustache and dresses of great richness, was smoking a short, fat cigar. She practically never spoke.

Of all those who had surrounded them there remained only old Miss Eno, whose pen name was Enoch Arden, and who wrote Society paragraphs for the *Police News*. Miss Eno didn't, poor thing, make more than seven and sixpence a week, and she was said to live by walking up to the members' tables in the lunch room and furtively extracting a roll whilst she enquired after the

healths of their children, their pet dogs, or their servants. She remained firmly seated within three feet of the Princess, for she was determined to hear what was said in that group. Indeed, by paragraphs descriptive of the Princess and her friends, she had in the last three weeks made more than two pounds ten extra, so that she was thinking of buying some new corsets, a shirt waist, and a pair of shoes that would not hurt her poor feet.

Mr. Macpherson made his bows to the two ladies, and then he returned to the middle of the room. He beckoned to the departing groups and exclaimed in his enormously high voice :

" Hi ! all of you, don't run away, group yourselves around me." He assured them that he was not going to read any of his poems, but that he had an enormously important announcement to make. " We're going to have tremendous times ! " he chanted. " Come along, Mrs. Dubarry, come along, Mrs. Wilsford ! Just you come and listen to me ! "

No one took Mr. Macpherson very seriously, so that most of them continued to move away, and only one or two remained.

He told them to keep quite still, and then he called out :

" There's a millionaire—a terrific millionaire—who is going to make all our fortunes ! "

Several people stayed still at this announcement, that was uttered in a voice so high and so loudly that it reached every corner of the room. He continued as loudly :

" Mr. Aaron Rothweil is going to start a magazine ! "

A great stir, like a gust of wind in corn, went through the whole company. There was no single person there who did not desire to contribute to a new magazine.

They crowded round Cluny; they made a ring for him, and for five minutes he was like an Emperor dominating his subjects.

"This chap, Rothweil," he went on, "he's a tremendous chap. You all know *his* name. And why? We're all of us clean because we use Rothweil's Soap. And now he's going to start a magazine." Mr. Rothweil was going to start a daily paper later on. But just now it was a magazine. None of them, Mr. Macpherson said, knew anything about Rothweil, so they had all better be quiet and listen. Rothweil had used to call himself Fleight—which was a silly thing to do because no one had ever heard that name, and everyone knew that of Rothweil. It was respected throughout the world. It was as respected as Rothschild, or Birnbaum, or Oppenheim, or even Macpherson.

"So now you know all about him," Mr. Macpherson continued. "And now I'll tell you all about the magazine."

It was only going to print the best and most unsaleable writing. Mr. Rothweil was going to carry it on even if it cost him five thousand a year—for three years. Think of that! It meant five thousand a year thrown complete into the laps of those present. It might mean anything from a hundred and fifty a year for every one of them.

They were just to think of that! Miss Denman, there present, would be able to write about Shakespeare's being Bacon until the name of Shakespeare would stink in all their nostrils. Miss Watchett would be able to advocate unceasingly laws making all babies up to eighteen months of age be carried about in spinal carriages. Miss Shoesmith would be able to propound her favourite plan of feeding the poor with cuttle fish

from the Dogger Bank. There wouldn't, as he expressed it, be any crank of them all who would not be able to make her voice heard.

"Isn't it glorious?" he began his peroration; "isn't it fun? Don't we live in exciting times? So you'd all better raise your tea-cups and drink the health of the man Rothweil. I knew a nasty fellow called Doe whose aunt always toasted the late Queen in China tea, and she had a sister who bred Newfoundlands,"—at least, Mr. Macpherson went on, he thought they were Newfoundlands. At any rate, she bred something, or perhaps it was that she took an interest in the Home for Abandoned Girls. Yes, that was it; because Mr. Macpherson knew she used to give the most extraordinary parties, and some one had once tried to blackmail Mr. Macpherson there. But he had said: "What's the use of trying to blackmail a chap who wears a flannel shirt." They had better go and try it on with that fellow Morgan. And so they had. And it had cost Morgan a pretty penny. Or, perhaps it was only seven pounds. Or, perhaps it was only that he got them into the hospital. Anyhow, it was a great nuisance and Mr. Macpherson was very glad because Morgan was a nasty fellow.

It was at this point that some one asked whether Mr. Macpherson was going to be the editor of the new magazine, and Miss Macphail commented:

"Of course not! Who'd be such an idiot as to employ Cluny?"

Mr. Macpherson's happy face fell for a moment.

"Of course I'm not going to be the editor," he recovered himself. "I'm a poet. That's not my job. But Charlie Mitchell is going to edit it, and old Blood is going to look after him, and I can make them do whatever I like."

"I'll cholly well take care you don'd do anything of the sort," Miss Macphail commented.

"Oh, you're only the assistant editor," Mr. Macpherson said with good-natured contempt. "You only get the job because Blood is sweet on your sister Wilhelmina. We all know that, so don't you talk."

"At any rate, I'm the assistant editor," Miss Macphail said grimly, and she moved slowly towards the door.

"You aren't going to have to do with selecting the manuscripts. You're only going to be called that," Mr. Macpherson brought out, "so that you can trot about and boom the magazine with the Smart Set." Miss Macphail, he said, was going to pretend to get everybody's articles put in and then she was going to be very sorry because the real editor threw them out for lack of space. That's what Augusta was, and a good job too, because Cluny did not like her at all. She had been very rude to him, and if anybody thought they could be very rude to him without his hitting back they were very much mistaken. There was a fellow called White who had a sister. Her name was Marjorie, or it may have been Campaspe, or Susan, or something like that. And one day White said that Cluny could not play tennis. So Cluny had gone to Lady Mallett's ball and told everybody that Campaspe —no, her real name was Elizabeth—Elizabeth did not look at all well in peach green. And since that was the fashionable colour that year, she lost her chance with the Hon. Rupert Tree and that broke her heart. So that was how Mr. Macpherson had scored Mr. White off. "But, of course, afterwards," Mr. Macpherson was finishing, "I introduced her to Lady Costorfine, of Pittlochrie, and she married her son, and she is now——"

His voice gradually died away. He was standing

alone in the centre of the room. All the rest of the company had followed Miss Macphail downstairs.

Cluny went contentedly to the Princess and the Countess Paramatti.

"I excited some of those people, didn't I?" he said. "Now I'm going to read you my poems. *Je vais vous lire des vers, Princesse.*" The ladies received this announcement with contentment, since it meant that he would pay their bills, and they were not displeased when he announced that, afterwards, he was going to take them to the dinner of the Enamel Club, where they would hear him open a discussion as to whether life were worth living unwashed. And that, he said, would be a good job, too, because he would be able to bring in about Rothweil and his soap and the new magazine before Augusta Macphail could get her oar in. He was accustomed to pretend to his friends that he was engaged to Augusta Macphail, because she was a poor devil and it did her good to have it thought that she was engaged to a rich man. But he would jolly well call that off. "I'm the man for these jobs," he concluded. "You won't have to dress because we all have to pretend that we're coming to the club dirty. That's very amusing, that is, very amusing! And then we have a cake of soap beside the plates and we wash in the finger bowls. That's my idea; it's sort of mediæval. You can read about it in the 'Jackdaw of Rheims'—'*La Pie Parlante de Rheims, Princesse,*' or—no! the French for jackdaw isn't *pie.* I don't know what it is. But there's a jolly good story by a Frenchman, whose name I've forgotten, about a magpie who got drunk and knocked over a paraffin lamp and was burnt to death. And a jolly good thing too, because I hate magpies!"

Miss Macphail came hastily into the room followed more slowly by several of the members. They desired to press their claims for permanent engagement on the staff of the new magazine. She came straight up to Mr. Macpherson and remarked :

" Cluny, you haven't introduced me to the Princess." And then she said to the Princess in French :

" Altesse, I am editor of the new magazine. We shall be exactly the people to press your claims upon the Government."

Mr. Macpherson pulled his blue foolscap out of his pocket and began at once upon the adventures of Kwang Su. His high voice echoed mournfully through the deserted rooms. All the members were discussing their chances with the new magazine in the tea-room on the ground floor.

Rapidly, and in excellent French, Miss Macphail exclaimed that she could not for the life of her understand why they allowed themselves to be bored to death by an imbecile like Cluny Macpherson.

Afterwards they all four went to the dinner of the Enamel Club.

## IV

THE Enamel Club Dinner of that evening was an affair more than usually brilliant. It happened that Mr. Macpherson had got hold of an official of the United States Treasury, who was visiting this country in order to confer with the British Government as to the currency question. He was called the Hon. Hiram S. Whail.

Cluny had assured him that the Enamel Club embraced all the brilliance, wit and genius of the City of London—and of the Administrative County, too. For—Mr. Macpherson, in a digression lasting three-quarters of an hour, affirmed—you cannot afford to ignore the suburbs. Mr. Macpherson knew a gentleman called Saul, and residing at Acton, West, who had invented a most ingenious form of paper kite. And that was what they wanted.

The Hon. Hiram had been dazzled by Cluny's eloquence, and he had not been able to resist the temptation of informing the Foreign Office that he was going to be present at that dinner, and that he considered it one of the greatest privileges of his life.

The Foreign Office had been really worried by the announcement. It had never heard of the Enamel Club, but the Enamel Club held its meetings mostly in Soho. The Foreign Office regarded Soho as an exceedingly undesirable quarter, inhabited, as it was, almost entirely by aliens. That Office had, therefore, communicated with the Treasury, and had insisted that something must be done. They must preserve their distinguished

guest from all possibility of physical danger or from any immoral scenes. The matter was even forced upon the attention of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He insisted that one of the Junior Lords must accompany the Hon. Hiram to the dinner.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Right Honourable Edward Lorraine Parment, was one of the mysteries of the political situation, as he was one of the terrors of the more practical politicians of his own side. Of quite good, but not very distinguished, middle-class origin, he had entered politics as a private gentleman and had steadily worked his way to the front by means of an amiable, heavy, half-humorous half-pompous manner. But no sooner had he come into really prominent office—and owing to the senility of his colleagues of greater standing in the Cabinet, he was certainly the most prominent man of the day—no sooner had he arrived at this position than he began to display a gloomy, democratic, and doctrinaire fury that excessively worried the more conservative members of the party. They considered that he was making a formidable bid, in a demagogic manner, for the dictatorship of the country.

But, as a matter of fact, heavy, hook-nosed and grey, with disordered pepper-and-salt hair and tired eyes, the Chancellor was perfectly sincere in his democratic furies. He was one of those men, like the late Count Tolstoy, to whom, towards the end of his life, a sort of message seemed to have been vouchsafed. This may have been due to his physical condition, for until he was of the age of about sixty Mr. Parment had never known what it was to consult a doctor. He had possessed enormous physical vigour, so that great exertions had been a necessary part of his normal life. But latterly

a pain in his right leg, which he regarded as being of a rheumatic origin and neglected, had very much spoilt his temper, and he took out the more sombre moments of his career in speeches and pronouncements of an exaggerated bitterness. As he saw it himself, having arrived at a great and rather lonely height, when personal ambition had no longer to be satisfied, he had suddenly found conviction and the desire to do something for what he called the great, true things. Then, side by side with his sombre humour, he possessed, as is the case with so many men who become mystics late in life, an appearance of geniality and wit, and quite a shrewd knowledge of the world. He was hardly, in any sense of the word, a cultured man. He had read comparatively few books, but he had a love for music, and during his life he had three times begun to make collections of antiquities.

Now, he was, as you might say, beginning to collect men—the soldiers of an army who should triumphantly effect a revolution in favour of a newer and purer democracy. To this end he sent for various younger members of the House and interviewed them upon one pretext or another. Since he had been in the Cabinet he had rather lost touch with the rank and file of the party, and even with the methods by which the party was kept going; and since, with his knowledge of the world, he was aware that this might be a possible source of future danger, he was anxious to inspect the personnel of his following. It was not his actual intention at these interviews to do more than just inspect the men. He meant to be rather heavily jocular, so as to give them the idea of a friendly and benignant personality. As, however, his enthusiasm for the great, true things was becoming something of a monomania with him, he

found it almost impossible to keep from dropping into rather rousing but muddled speeches of a semi-fanatical order. But, in the beginning, he intended always to be strictly humorous, and, in this frame of mind, he saw in the affair of the Honourable Hiram Whail an opportunity for calling some of his minor supporters before him.

The Junior Lords of the Treasury being all, with one exception, working-men members—it was just after the second reconciliation between the Government and the Labour Party, and jobs had had to be found in large quantities for the more troublesome representatives of the proletariat—had declared that they would be hanged if they would go to any place where the eating was so undecorative as in Soho. They, too, had eaten there in earlier days, and they found that that region lacked marble and gilding.

Amongst their number, however, there had been found the Hon. Reginald Debenham, who afterwards, as will be remembered, became, under the title of Lord Whitecliff, Foreign Secretary in Mr. Parment's Cabinet—a cousin of the Prime Minister and brother-in-law once removed of the Leader of the Opposition. Mr. Debenham had sat in the House for nearly three years and a half, and he was supposed to be very much disgusted with the slowness of the promotion that he had received, considering the exalted nature of his connections. It was, indeed, considered in political circles that he had the strongest intention of changing his party at an early opportunity.

This, however, was a mistake, for Mr. Debenham was just a hard-working, rather vacuous young member with a good deal of knowledge of Parliamentary life and with much contempt for politicians. Mr. Parment had

formerly been the private secretary of Mr. Debenham's father, the Earl of Whitecliff, and at that period Mr. Debenham regarded the great man with practically no respect or deference.

"But, hang it all!" Mr. Debenham had grumbled, when, speaking with an air of jocular fatuity, the enormous elderly gentleman had said that, if Mr. Debenham would perform the arduous and patriotic duty of accompanying Mr. Whail to the banquet, the party might make it worth Mr. Debenham's while, "it may ruin my confounded digestion for ever and ever." He knew that the Chancellor's proposition was just the silly sort of joke that great men allow themselves when they condescend. He had, indeed, been familiar with Mr. Parment's attempts at jocularity all his life and he knew the correct sort of vein in which to answer. Mr. Debenham was an extraordinarily faultlessly groomed young man of perhaps thirty-four. His brown hair was so smooth that it shone like a silk-hat, and his black satin tie resembled a waterfall, whilst his normally complaining tones filtered through a heavy, but ordered, brown moustache. "You've never heard of anyone eating anything at one of those places! Whoever did? That's a proof that they all died immediately afterwards."

The Chancellor looked more humorously solemn.

"You forget that we're the democratic party," he said. "Your condescension would have an excellent effect."

Mr. Debenham exclaimed: "Oh, rats!" He had no awe of the great man when he was in this humour. He added: "You ate all your meals at a Lockhart's just before your bye-election when you went up into the Cabinet, and that did not prevent your getting the

chuck and having to sit for a Welsh borough where they aren't particular."

"I'll tell you what to do," the Chancellor said. "Put a handful of pepsin tablets in your waistcoat pockets, and eat practically nothing. Then come and have something with me at Downing Street afterwards. I can manage quite a good grill."

"I'm hanged if your cook can be trusted to do anything else, then!" Mr. Debenham grumbled. "And your confounded pepsin things would ruin the set of my waistcoat. Don't you know that one never puts anything in one's dress waistcoats—not even so much as a cloak-room voucher?"

"I didn't know," the Chancellor said humbly. "I usually carry a small flask of brandy and milk—when I am speaking." He added hastily: "Of course it's the very best brandy," for he had perceived a look of agony and horror in Mr. Debenham's eyebrows.

"Oh! you know," he said, "you would never have done that when you were my governor's secretary. The governor would never have stood that. I remember distinctly, you used to be a slim sort of chap. You carried me about on your shoulders."

"I don't really do it now," the Chancellor said. "That was an attempt at a joke, suggested by the habits of Bismarck."

"Never heard of it," Mr. Debenham said. And then he added, "I can't understand how you Front Bench men up towards the box seats find time to waste. Why don't you just tell me to go to the blessed dinner and have done with it?"

"Ah, but you're such a change for me, Reggie," the great man said. "I come back, with the mind of a refreshed eagle after a little talk with

you. It's like having been in the nursery with the children."

Mr. Debenham said, not ungraciously:

"Well, talk away. I don't mind being of use——"

The Chancellor hesitated for a minute. He was rather outside his junior's sphere of parliamentary interests, and his private leisure was just then being given to the collection of tokens from Greek tumuli—leaden objects, stamped or cast, that Mr. Debenham could not be expected to appreciate—so that he was at a loss for small talk. But still there had been something he wanted to talk about. He had not at all sufficiently deeply sounded the young man to suit his present purpose.

"Ah!" he said after a moment, "I hear poor George Cronk has resigned for Byefleet."

"Had to," Mr. Debenham said laconically. "I understand the bobbies will be on his track in just a fortnight. Stocks and shares, you know. I never understand how johnnies get into trouble over that sort of job. But there it is. What do you suppose he's been and done?"

"I don't know," the Chancellor said vaguely. "People do things," he added after a moment. "I suppose he'll get something?"

"Consul at Valparaiso," Mr. Debenham said. "His seat's in a shocking state. Simply shocking!"

The Chancellor said: "Ah!" and then, "It's too bad," as if his mind had retreated into regions infinitely remote from Mr. Debenham and his worries.

"It's too damn bad!" Mr. Debenham said, "and Mungo——"

"Who's Mungo?" the Chancellor asked.

"The Chief," Mr. Debenham said. "The Chief

Whip," he explained further. "Don't you see? His name's Gunne—and so you get to park — park of artillery. And then to Mungo—Mungo Park."

"I see," the Chancellor said.

"Anyhow, Mungo puts it all on me," Mr. Debenham grumbled. "None of your labour johnnies will be bothered—they're four-hundred-pounders to a man, and what with having to make their living writing articles for the blackmailing penny weeklies——"

"So that's how they make ends meet?" the great man asked. "I've often wondered."

"You do live a cloistered life," Mr. Debenham said.

"In my time," the Chancellor said apologetically, "we had to do it by articles in the quarterlies."

"Oh, that's all done with," the young man said. "Nobody has an easy time now like you had—I'm sure I don't. What was I talking about?"

"About the Byefleet Division of Kent," the Chancellor said. 'You were being very interesting."

"Well, it's in a disgustin' condition," Mr. Debenham took up his grumble again. "Cronk, that's got to bolt, didn't dare hint that a successor had better be under way for fear people got it into their heads that he was dicky, and quodded him right off. And Mungo had trusted Cronk because he always seemed such a keen beggar."

"That's always the devil," the Chancellor said.

"And Cronk hadn't done any organisin' in the confounded place because he was so busy with his companies—hadn't been there since the General. And he hadn't spent any money because he was gettin' so deuced hard up. And it's the devil of a place for corruption. Five pounds a head, Cronk said, his voters used to cost him."

"Oh, come!" the Chancellor said, and he was suddenly aroused to a feeling of deep shockedness; "you mustn't talk like that—you really mustn't."

"Ah, you don't know the good old county of Kent," Mr. Debenham said. "How do you suppose one of our men is going to get in there? Love of democratic measures? Hatred of tyranny? Not half!"

The Chancellor said: "But still, we mustn't say so."

"I suppose," Mr. Debenham said, "that's the way you work yourself up for your rare old spread-eagle, smash-their-coronetted speeches. I've often wondered how you could manage that virtuous indignation. Mind you, it's fine, the way you do it. It carries even me away now and then. But, of course, you *couldn't* do it if you lived in the world as it is—not as I have to see it. Did you ever hear of Lady Guestling's head gardener? I must tell you. Lady Guestling is one of our thick-and-thinnest supporters now. There was a time . . . Well, you know . . . So, of course, all her servants had to be . . ."

"If you don't mind," the Chancellor said, "I'd rather not hear the story. I have to cultivate the very deepest respect for Lady Guestling."

Mr. Debenham opened his mouth in the widest astonishment. For a vague minute he had a slight sense of seeing something dangerous and sinister lurking behind the hitherto flabby jocularity of the Chancellor's enormous, grey personality. Because the Chancellor always wore a light grey frock coat, and was all light grey, he suggested to Mr. Debenham for a moment what one feels in looking at a friendly elephant—the idea of the formidable and dangerous energy that lies always at the disposal of such a beast. But then Mr. Debenham exclaimed:

"Oh, I see, that's irony!"

"It's partly irony," the Chancellor said; he looked at Mr Debenham, his head being bent down and his eyes very tired and small, and since he swayed slightly with an endless and persistent motion, lifting up first one foot and then the other, he resembled still more exactly what in our copybooks we were taught to call a monarch of the jungle. "Partly that I find it best to follow the gleam; to cultivate it, even, you know. It would be a good thing for you to do. Half you young private members get corrupted and ruin your careers by cultivating a sort of cheap cynicism."

"But hang it all!" Mr. Debenham said, in a really injured tone, "I am *not* a private member. I've got my nose in the mud. I can't help seeing these things. It is what you big men keep me for. It's what I have to do to keep you going."

The Chancellor said: "Yes, yes! But it's much better not to talk about it in a cynical manner. That gets you into a cynical tone, and that ruins you. It's not so much a matter of sentiment or morals, as just of practical wisdom."

"But you asked me about it," the young man said, still in an injured voice. "I didn't want to talk about it. It's I that have got to trot round and find a silly candidate with money enough for the rotten hole. I can't think of anybody except a cotton glove maker, with a perpetual cold in his head. There isn't anybody else. And old Mungo says the party is so hard up that the place has got to pay for itself. I don't know what we do with the money. I can never squeeze any out for anything I think needs doing in the South East, that I have to look after. I tell you the confounded party finances will be the death of me."

The Chancellor said :

" Oh, hush ! At any rate *that* isn't any part of your business."

" Well," Mr. Debenham said more mildly. " No, it's supposed to be part of the Organiser's department. But everything is so mixed up."

The Chancellor said :

" Yes, yes ! " and then : " I know——" ; and Mr. Debenham stood looking at him, his mind appearing to have gone away into space. He hung his head further and further over on his breast, and still he swayed very slightly from side to side. For a moment Mr. Debenham was perfectly convinced that he had gone mad.

" What we have got to do," the great man said suddenly, " is, as I have said, to cultivate idealism. One arrives at a stage when there's nothing else. Now you—now you, when you get to the top of the tree——"

" Oh, come ! " Mr. Debenham said.

" There's nothing to stop your getting to the top of the tree," the Chancellor retorted. " You're not too intelligent. You're not too unsteady. You're not disloyal."

Mr. Debenham said : " H'm ! "

" Oh, no, you're not," the Chancellor said. " It's said—your father has told me himself—that you have some idea of going over to the other side because—well, it doesn't matter why."

Mr. Debenham said hotly : " I never had the remotest idea of the sort. I daresay my father would like to get me into a better sort of shop to save his confounded pocket, but I'm not that sort of skunk."

The Chancellor looked for a moment rather vaguely at Mr. Debenham as if he hadn't heard what was said.

Then he collected himself and smiled with a friendly assurance. "But you just wait," he went on. "Cultivate idealism in the meantime. Read history. Consider how precedent broadens down to precedent. That's it! The great truths—the great, fine truths!"

Mr. Debenham said:

"I say!"

"Oh, I know," the Chancellor said, "you're inclined to laugh at me. Just as you used to do when I was a dependant in your father's house. But these things are not just matters of coincidence. There's the finger of Fate, too."

"This is all very funny," Mr. Debenham said.

"It isn't a bit funny," the great man said wearily. "It's just inevitable. That's it! When you come out at the top, you come out at the other end, too. I suppose you have got a job now because I've looked after you. And I suppose I've looked after you because you used to ride round on my shoulder. There are changes coming."

Mr. Debenham said: "Oh!"

"Considerable changes!" the Chancellor repeated.

Mr. Debenham said: "Ah!"

"Anyhow," the other answered, "you go to this dinner. That will give me a chance to say you aren't above doing little, useful things. And cultivate idealism. Yes, that!"

It was in this way that Mr. Debenham came to be at the dinner of the Enamel Club.

## V.

MR. DEBENHAM'S mind was an odd mixture of amazement at his interview with the great man and of astonishment at the company in which he found himself.

The chair was unoccupied, the chairman being Pal Ho Pi, a Chinaman who, in the fourteenth century before Christ, had invented the art of enamelling on copper. But a purple and green silk dressing-gown was hung over the back of the vacant chair, and to this Mr. Macpherson, as perpetual vice-chairman of the club, addressed his remarks. He styled the garment: Great Grand Chairman.

The room itself was rather low. It was T-shaped, allowing for a high table and two lower ones. The waiters were dirtier than the guests; the soup was smoked, but the *hors d'œuvres* were quite possible, and Mr. Debenham, seated next Mr. Whail, who was himself next the vacant chair, ate so much of the *filets d'hareng* that for the rest of the evening he felt positively unwell, this colouring his views of the remaining guests.

He had never been at such a disgusting exhibition; he had never heard such voluble talk in his life. He had never taken much stock of artistic people—you did not meet them at Cambridge, or at the tables of provision merchants, or in the House of Commons much, and he had always avoided them. And it seemed to him positively indecent that people should really enjoy themselves as these seemed to be doing.

There were men who looked like weasels and others like the tops of bass brooms; there were women who

looked like eels with green dresses falling off their shoulders and others who resembled over-ripe pears. There were other individuals who appeared unreasonably smart. It could not even be said that he did not know anybody there. There were two men—the one grey and rather bald, the other, fat, blonde, gold-spectacled, and wearing an immense white waistcoat because he was going on somewhere.

These two he had certainly met—they might, of course, be gentlemen's servants, he didn't know. And then, with a dismayed feeling, he made out Mrs. Bleischroeder, the wife of the senior member for Ealing. She was there with her husband's secretary, a dark, thin young man, only known as Harry.

This dissatisfied Mr. Debenham exceedingly. Mrs. Bleischroeder was the most determined climber of Mr. Debenham's acquaintance. She had worried him so much in his official capacity; he seemed to know her so well as to be absolutely convinced. If she was sitting amongst these absurd and disagreeable people it was because these absurd and disagreeable people were worth cultivating.

This was appalling! This was very wearisome to Mr. Debenham. He knew he was not a very clever fellow, he knew he had a great deal to learn, and he knew he had to do his duty. As a junior whip it was his duty to make the party popular wherever it could be made popular by personal attentions and politeness. That was his job. He had to cultivate everybody who was worth cultivation, but he had never contemplated the necessity of being polite to the intellectuals.

He detested the intellectuals because they sneered so. At Cambridge you sneered, too. It was the tone of the place—a lofty aloofness. But there were, even at that,

certain things—the moral, nobler aspects, the manly gentlemanliness, the non-emotional English novelists, like Surtees—that you spared. But these people! He had always thought that they ought not to be allowed to exist, at any rate outside Oxford, where they sometimes had crazes for chaps like Swinburne.

He thought these people were even worse than Jews; he did not personally object to Jews, though there were certainly getting to be a deuced lot of them. But they could be trusted to turn on a good cigar and to go into whichever lobby they belonged to without any trouble whatever.

Hitherto Mr. Debenham had had to consider and to conciliate the society that hung round the first class offices—the Foreign Office, and the rest. This was because those chaps mostly belonged in private to the opposition and grew sulky if you did not pet them. He had had to pet working men, too; to pat their wives on the back and see that they got good places in the ladies' galleries. Tradesmen of importance in one constituency or another he had to consider, and he had had, of course, to lick the very boots of journalists. In that way, from time to time, he had got mentioned in the Lobby Notes of the various periodicals supporting the Government as the "efficient," the "helpful," or even the "highly popular and genial," fourth Junior Whip. He did not want those tributes for his private comfort, but he had to earn them just for the sake of the party. The first two styles meant about three whiskies; the last implied at least champagne. That was a bore, but there it was.

But it seemed to him at that moment that, when it came to kowtowing to these people, it was almost as far as he could go. Yet Mrs. Bleischroeder was there.

He became possessed with a sudden desire to know who all these people were. And, putting on his especial, junior whip's professional smile, Mr. Debenham asked his next door neighbour, without looking at him :

" Who are all these people ? "

And then he started. His next door neighbour was a little yellow man, with narrow, expressionless eyes, in a black suit; his black, thick hair and moustaches seemed to be kept stiffly in their places with boot polish.

This gentleman said :

" I do not know. I am, like honourable self, an honoured guest of the evening without merit."

Mr. Debenham considered, from this exhibition of suspicion, that the Siamese must be in the Diplomatic service of his country. Yet it was odd that the F.O. had not asked him to take charge of the Siamese as well as the Yankee. But the Oriental continued gravely :

" I am myself a humble artist of execrable technique, not like yourself a mighty genius, probably, of the pen, which is more mighty than the sword." He continued that he came to this country in order to draw execrable pictures of all Society, from the high brow to the lowest on Bank Holiday. If, politely, Mr. Debenham would lend him his honourable ears, he would attempt to recount the catalogue of the other honourables.

It seemed to Mr. Debenham that nearly everybody present was a translator. There was Miss Dugong, a very mild and quiet old lady, who translated from the Persian ; there was Mr. Hopple, who interpreted French lithographs for the honourable British public. Mr. Debenham did not know what the Siamese gentleman meant by this, and it did not seem to matter much. Mr. Hopple had very long, greenish hair and practically

no teeth. The Hon. Roden Cam, who looked clean enough, translated Chinese enigmas. Miss Marchant, a handsome, dark girl, wore a white turban over her black hair, and a dress of scarlet and green Paisley shawls. She had spent six months among the Vlachs and, after dinner, she was going to sit cross-legged upon the table and intone some of the love songs of that people. Next her sat Mr. Lidgate, the only person who understood Walloon. He was going to make some very spirited translations, though as yet he had not begun. The fat, blonde man, whose face Mr. Debenham had known, was Keddle, the publisher. He was being almost torn open—as to his upper garments—by Miss Honor Sima Charpoy, on the one side, and, on the other, by Miss Childy. Miss Childy wrote books about the Poor Law and its incidence, and was known to have spoken to the Chancellor of the Exchequer for a quarter of an hour. Miss Charpoy's poems, according to the Siamese, ought certainly to be in their fifty-fourth edition. They were written against female suffrage, but no one had been found to publish them. Beyond Miss Charpoy the faces grew rather dim on account of the distance and the blur of the lights, but Mr. Debenham was assured that every person there was someone of immense celebrity and importance. He thought impatiently that this was only the Oriental's politeness, but he had to remind himself that in these days of the four-hundred-pounder in the House of Commons almost anybody might become almost anything. And at that moment the Siamese said :

" Jolly influential crowd ! So am I credibly informed by Hon. Mrs. Bleischroeder. Hon. Mrs. Bleischroeder proclaims that this crowd not only presents decorative appearance in gilded saloons, and impeggably impresses

constituents, what you call voters, of Hon. husband's suburb, but will talk about you day and night if you agreeably fill their bellies with continental comestibles and leave their volumes lying on marble tables."

Mr. Debenham fell into gloomy reflections over a green, white and pink ice that was melting into a frilled paper bearing two black finger-marks. That, he said to himself, was what Mrs. Bleischroeder was up to. That was, perhaps, what the new tendencies came to, with the four-hundred-pounders and all. The husband of Mrs. Bleischroeder undoubtedly had a reputation for knowledge of finance such as was possessed by no other private member. Yet there were at least a dozen men who were quite as good as he, but never got listened to. That had always struck Mr. Debenham as odd.

Mr. Bleischroeder was quite unreasonably unpresentable, even for the House of Commons. He wore his hat grotesquely, but not at all jauntily, on the back of his head ; his waistcoat was always decorated with the remains of his last meal, and to be addressed by him at all close quarters was like being confronted by a small fountain. Moreover, his German accent was so extraordinarily strong that once that rude man, Mr. de Soissons, had interrupted one of Mr. Bleischroeder's speeches to ask the Speaker whether the hon. member was in order in addressing the House in an unknown oriental dialect.

Yet Mr. Debenham knew very well that, when he made up his lists of members who were to be allowed to catch the Speaker's eye on any debate whatsoever, he might ruthlessly cross out the names of the largest ship-owner, or the largest banker, or the director of the largest railway in the empire, but that a great deal more care had to be exercised over the case of the senior

member for Ealing. A sort of awe seemed to attach to his name. Anybody who happened to be about would say :

" Oh, you mustn't chop him out ! He's one of the intellectual strong men of the day."

At Mr. Debenham's elbow the voice of the Siamese was going on, slowly, clearly, with foreign intonations like the voice of fate.

" That is," he was saying, " so Hon. Mrs. Bleischroeder was asseverating, the straight tip ! This she told me as a man making desirous a splendacious career in this portion of the Western hemisphere."

And suddenly there came into his head a picture of that lady as he had often seen her on the Terrace, carting about little parties of odd-looking people.

The grubby intellectuals ! He detested them, for they were, in a sense, tyrants. They came along and told you that a certain book which was dull, repulsive, or dirty was the living masterpiece of the world. You didn't have to read the beastly thing, but at the same time you just had to shut your mouth about any kind of book. They made you timid. And as it was with books, so it was with pictures, with musical comedy, with politics, with the Poor Law—when she had fed them well, Mrs. Bleischroeder had simply trotted gangs of them down to the Terrace of the House of Commons. And they had just clawed on to the buttonholes of any member that came along, and howled to him that Mr. Bleischroeder was the greatest financial intellect of the age. And the poor members were blackmailed and tyrannised into believing this, so that not only was Mr. Bleischroeder bound to be in the Speaker's list ; he had to be listened to with respect by the tyrannised members. Of course he had some ability.

"It's a beautiful plant!" Mr. Debenham found himself saying aloud.

The Siamese gentleman, thinking that he referred to a sad looking aspidestra decorated with paper roses, which stood on the cloth in front of the chairman's vacant chair, remarked:

"Yes, indeed, it is remarkable at what a standard the arts have arrived in this honourable country."

"Now you really think that?" Mr. Debenham asked. "That's your view as an independent observer?"

The Siamese began a panegyric of English rock gardens, mentioning the name of several firms of seedsmen, and of one or two gardens in the county of Surrey. And, since Mr. Debenham could not in the least understand why he had taken this sudden start, he was really rather relieved when Mr. Cluny Macpherson rapped on the table. He stood up and announced that he was about to deliver his vice-presidential address on the question: "Is life worth living unwashed?"

There were digressions in Mr. Macpherson's speech that, in Mr. Debenham's opinion, would have done credit to any minister who was trying to talk out a subject; there was a gay spirit, a childlike imbecility. There were occasional passages of indelicacy. That, of course, is the salt of life, but you cannot, as a rule, get it into a speech for fear of offending susceptibilities. Mr. Macpherson, however, without doubt, knew his audience.

"There was a chap called Michelangelo," Mr. Macpherson began his peroration. "I daresay some of you know his name." At this there was some laughter, and Mr. Debenham could not help feeling his disgust rising. Mr. Macpherson's speech had excited in his inexperienced mind a feeling almost of nausea—it was

the irresponsible tone acting on the Cambridge moral sense that was never very long dormant in the mind of the junior whip.

"This fellow Michelangelo," Cluny was continuing, "at least, I think it was Michelangelo—because, of course, it may have been Cino da Pistoia or Pico della Mirandola—but I think it was Michelangelo, because I remember reading it in a book bound in buckram in two volumes. Yes, it was Symonds' life of Michelangelo. Well, this chap lived to be 97, or 102, or something, and he never had his boots off during the last fifteen years of his life. They were soled and heeled on him. And he left in his will his direction to his nephew never to wash himself, but to rub himself—*nunca se lavare ma se stroppare.* And he was a jolly old boy, and his praises are sung in all lands where soap is known, and that's all I've got to say about whether life is worth living unwashed."

He called then upon his friend, the Hon. Hiram S. Whail, who, Cluny said, was a tremendous fellow in his own land. He had invented the machine for washing banknotes and putting them into circulation again.

Mr. Whail was an American of the old style, with rugged features and a huge white beard. He took oratory very seriously, and he took this subject with a deep earnestness. He waved his arms like a windmill and overwhelmed that club with a panegyric of the sons of Old Glory—and of the daughters, too. There was great applause when he spoke of these ladies as being as pure as their native streams, cold as their native rocks, and chaste as the blue skies that spread over Maine. He pointed out that every house in Boston of any size had sixteen bathrooms, and an air of bewilderment overspread his hearers. They could not understand whether

this was a joke, a fairy story, or an insult. He then thrust his hands into the tail pockets of his frock coat, drew out a copy of the journal called *Tit-Bits*, read three jokes which had no bearing on anything at all, told a story about a nigger clergyman stealing chickens, and then began to shout a violent peroration as to the virility, sanity and fearlessness of American manhood and American ideals.

This was normal American oratory, and it did a great deal to restore Mr. Debenham to a good temper. He had heard the exact twin of that speech many times at the American Ambassador's, when he had attended Fourth of July banquets. It seemed to him to be normal, usual and proper to a Foreign Office atmosphere. It was eccentric, but that was Diplomatic America.

But Mr. Macpherson restored him to a furious state. That gentleman immediately approached him, pawed his shoulders and whispered in his ears. Debenham realised that the poet was begging him to make a speech. Cluny indicated two foreign ladies, whom Mr. Debenham took for inferior street-walkers, and assured him that the Princess Odintsov and the Countess Paramatti were really yearning to have a taste of his famous Parliamentary manner. He just had to do it, but he was so really insane with rage—at the thought that these people were what was the matter with the country, at the thought that it was they who had the power to push fellows like Bleischroeder—that he determined to insult them all so grossly that they could not miss noticing it.

Mr. Debenham had just one talent, that of mimicry, and he made them a speech that was the exact counterpart of one that might have been made by Lord Hugo Sheffield, who was the buffoon provided by the Tory Benches for the relief of the House. He said that there

was a great deal of tosh—Haw !—about the Englishman's tub—Haw, haw !—As a matter of fact—Haw, haw, haw ! —he did not suppose there were 20,000 persons—people of their own class of life—Haw, haw, haw, haw !—(And he could feel that the odious people round him had a sensible thrill of satisfaction at the suggestion that he included them in his class of life)—who took a bath more than once a week. There might be another 100,000 who took one once a month, and an additional 100,000 who did it more or less accidentally once a year. Say a quarter of a million out of a population of forty-eight millions. In the town of A—— Mr. Debenham said that he had once had occasion to make researches. He wanted some plumbing done, so he heard the details from the plumber. In the whole of that city, containing 30,000 inhabitants, there were only fourteen baths, and the public ones, which had been opened six years before, had been converted into a Corn Exchange because nobody visited them.

Nevertheless, Mr. Debenham began his peroration, we were the great, proud and noble empire that the members of the Enamel Club knew themselves to be—an empire where freedom from prejudice and noble intellect flourished—as he felt sure when he gazed upon them—in such a way as it had never done probably since the fabulous Augustan Age. And were they to be told that the victories of peace had been gained in the British bath tub ? Perish the thought ! Just as the victories of Wellington were gained in the playing grounds of Eton, so the moral, intellectual and artistic ascendency of these Islands—and his eminent friend, Mr. Kakimono Hiroshige had just, sitting at his side, assured him that the arts were flourishing in this country in a rare and refreshing state—the victories of British

intellect were gained, he was certain, in the festive halls, not of the bath, but of the Enamel Club!

There was true applause when Mr. Debenham sat down, and many of the members ran from their seats to shake him by the hands. This disgusted Mr. Debenham to just the breaking point. But Mr. Macpherson was standing up and exclaiming at the top of his shrill voice:

"Sit down, all of you. Especially you, Augusta. I've got an enormous announcement to make to you. Wealth is going to be poured into all your pockets. I've got hold of a new millionaire. If you don't sit down, Augusta, I certainly shan't even pretend I'm going to marry you. Sit down all of you. Now listen!"

A dead silence had fallen on the room, and even Mr. Debenham was conscious, through his annoyance, of the wish that he had got hold of the millionaire—to fill the vacated seat at East Byefleet in North Kent. The cotton merchant, that was all they had to fill the gap, was too egregious a fool and always snuffled. At any rate there was one comfort, and that was that the other side had no candidate either.

"There's a chap called Rothweil," Mr. Macpherson went on. "At least his name is Rothweil, but he calls himself Fleight, which is a silly sort of thing to do—only, perhaps, he wanted to live incognito!" Well, they all knew the name Rothweil's Soap. That was what made it particularly appropriate that it should be on that particular evening that he made the announcement. The point was that here was a perfectly virgin fortune. The chap hadn't gambled and hadn't drunk, and hardly smoked at all. It was a perfectly virgin fortune for all those chaps, and Mr. Macpherson had this man in his pocket. Wasn't it glorious? Wasn't it fun?

Wouldn't they all of them have to be nice to Mr. Macpherson now? And they were not to believe Augusta Macphail when she said that it was she that had him, because it was not! The man who was going to be Rothweil's bear-leader was old sanguinary Blood.

At the mention of this name Mr. Debenham became more alert; he sat up in his chair. He had met Mr. Blood several times—at his father's and in country houses. He had even approached Mr. Blood, but with little success, to try to get him to do something for the party. They would have been only too glad if Mr. Blood would have stood for Corbury—or rather for Byefleet itself—for Corbury, although it was not actually in the division, was within three miles of the chief polling town.

Mr. Macpherson repeated:

"The man who's going to be his bear-leader is old Blood, and if he's sweet on anybody it's Wilhelmina, not Augusta. And a good job, too, because I'm sure we all prefer Wilhelmina."

Mr. Debenham got out of his chair and sat himself down again on the chairman's dressing gown.

"I say," he whispered to Mr. Macpherson, "is your friend going in for politics?"

"That's just what he is going in for!" Mr. Macpherson exclaimed. "He's starting a new magazine, a new daily paper, and God knows what, just in order to get himself political influence. I tell you there will be millions of money going." Mr. Debenham rose straight from his chair and went out of the place. He was a member of the club in which Mr. Blood very frequently spent his evenings.

## VI

MR. BLOOD, who had got rid of Mr. Fleight towards seven, had dined at his club and was sitting, reflecting on the chances of the candidates for the Oaks, in a deep chair that looked right down the smoking room. He had so much of the desire to know things that it was his practice to keep his eye even upon the club smoking room.

The club was the chief Government social institution of the more old-fashioned type. He could see old Mr. Hayter, the member for a northern city, playing dominoes with Mr. O'Hague, the ancient member of the Irish League. Mr. Wilde, who had lost Devizes after sitting for it for twenty years, was asleep before the fire. Mr. Remington, the Government agent for Lancashire, was leaning forward and whispering to a man with very red hair—the only man in the room who was under seventy, except, of course, Mr. Blood himself. A fat county-court judge—Mr. Blood could not remember his name—was re-reading, and reading, and re-reading again a slip of paper containing probably the bill for his dinner. A liveried servant was standing beside him.

Mr. Blood judged that Remington, the agent, was up to something questionable, for, as he whispered to the red-haired man he gazed perpetually over his shoulder at Mr. Hayter, whom he seemed to suspect of listening.

A page brought Mr. Blood a slip that he glanced at. Then he said: "Show him up!" and he kept his eye

on the agent. The name on the slip was very ill-written ; it might have been Girten, in which case Mr. Blood would not know who he was. If it had been Garstein, it represented a political development that Mr. Blood had been expecting without fail, but not so soon. It would mean that Mr. Macpherson had been acting with great vigour in his capacity of news-spreader. He must have telephoned to Mr. Garstein, if it did prove to be that gentleman—in a frenzy of delighted power to give information.

Mr. Remington, the agent, suddenly started. His eyes went very round as he perceived an exceedingly fat man who was following a page across the room. The room itself was nearly one hundred and twenty feet long, its walls being decorated with portraits in oils—and generally by Millais—of departed party leaders. It took the fat man, who was very hot, an appreciable minute to pass Mr. Remington. As soon as Mr. Remington had the back of him, he whispered to the red-haired man, who stared with immense eyes at the fat new-comer. Then Mr. Remington got up and spoke to Mr. Hayter and the Irish member. They dropped their dominoes and stared at the stranger Certainly, therefore, this was Mr. Garstein.

" I was expecting you," Mr. Blood said to the fat man. " Sit down." He did not shake hands with him.

The fat man sat down and wheezed a little. He wiped his brow with a handkerchief. He was clean-shaven, enormous, and had wet, dark hair. His stomach presented the appearance of being a separate bag that he had tied in front of him.

He leant out of his chair towards Mr. Blood ; Mr. Blood moved further away. Mr. Garstein took a look at the room—there was no one within twenty yards of him.

The other members had returned to their dominoes, their slumbers and their whispering.

"So you did send for me?" Mr. Garstein whispered. "I could not make out that fellow's story."

Mr. Blood asked: "What fellow?"

"Said his name was Cluny Macpherson," Mr. Garstein whispered on. "Couldn't make out much from his story. He was too excited. There was something about a club where they did not wash. What do you make of it?"

"How should I know, my good fellow?" Mr. Blood said.

Mr. Garstein wiped his face once more and then completely recaptured his breath.

"I've hurried round here," he said. "That excited chap appeared to recommend it. You seemed to be at the bottom of the show—and another man. A soap man!"

"At the bottom of the club where they did not wash?" Mr. Blood asked.

"I don't know," Mr. Garstein said. "There was something about millions and party funds, and you. But there was most about a club where they did not wash. He seemed to be going to make a speech."

"He was!" Mr. Blood answered.

"Of course, I know," Mr. Garstein began again; "it was a strong step my coming here. But I seemed to gather you invited. That chap Macpherson was so *extraordinarily* excited."

"Oh, he's always excited!" Mr. Blood answered. "But still, it's just as well you came. What's your offer? Think it out for a minute while I go and send a message."

"Offer?" Mr. Garstein said in an appalled manner.

Mr. Blood strolled down the long room ; the portraits in oils of departed leaders following him with their eyes had expressions of democratic passion. He went into the hall and asked the telephone porter to ring him up Palatial Hall, Hampstead, and ask for Mr. Fleight. And in a minute or two—during the interval he engaged himself in studying the latest tape prices, and perceived that Redmaynes had dropped to 32¼—he was in a dark box saying to Mr. Fleight :

" It's a shame to trouble you so soon. But things have developed. Thanks to Cluny they have developed extraordinarily. Could you come down here ? The Opposition caucus are after you."

The voice of Mr. Fleight said tremulously :

" What ? What ? "

" The chief devil," Mr. Blood said, " the chief devil to the Opposition agent in chief is here after you. The chap who does the Opposition's really filthy work—not the merely dirty one. Could you come down and hear what they have to propose ? "

" Oh, I say ! " Mr. Fleight's voice exclaimed. " I'm in the middle of a most painful scene. She might—cut her throat—you know—very painful. If I left."

" Oh, tell the lady the terms will be most liberal," Mr. Blood said ; " that will calm her for to-night. I want you to come."

" Of course, you are a most wonderful man ! " Mr. Fleight said. " It's astounding—perfectly astounding, how things fall out as you predict."

" I didn't come here to hear that," Mr. Blood said. " I want you down here to-night. I'll tell you why—Redmaynes have dropped to 32¼."

" I don't know what that means," Mr. Fleight said plaintively.

"It means," Mr. Blood said, "that a man called Cronk will have left the country to-night. He's the member for Byefleet, near Corbury. You might be the candidate for the constituency to-morrow."

"I say, how do you know these things?" Mr. Fleight asked. "I don't know what to do. I might give her some drops that would take her through the night."

"I shall expect you in three-quarters of an hour," Mr. Blood said. He hung up the receiver and sauntered into the reading room, where he consulted several commercial books of reference.

In the hall he met the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who had come there to give a labour leader a very earnest talking to.

Mr. Blood nodded friendlily.

"Still keying things up a bit?" he asked.

The Chancellor laughed.

"They want it," he said. "We need enthusiasm."

He was waiting for a cab. Mr. Blood paused. He did not know the Chancellor very well; it was not a type that he much liked. And Mr. Parment looked more monstrous than usual, because his dress clothes fitted him so badly that it appeared as if his waistcoat and coat were half off his shoulders. He had a moody and very abstracted air, and Mr. Blood could not help seeing, as Mr. Debenham had seen in the afternoon, that he had possibilities of being really dangerous in a heavy, sudden way. It was almost a feeling of madness that he conveyed. Every now and then he would fumble with his coat button, though that was not by any means a habitual gesture of his. Mr. Blood was about to turn away when the Chancellor himself said, in a friendly, family note:

"How's your brother? Isn't he ever coming out

of retirement? You tell him from me that he ought to."

"Oh!" Mr. Blood said. And then he remembered that the Chancellor had gone out to India on the same liner some years before with his brother, who was then an engineer with brilliant prospects.

"I don't know," Mr. Blood said. "I can't do anything to wake him up. But I'm much obliged to you for remembering him."

"Oh, he was a most extraordinary man!" the Chancellor said. "A sort of a sombre genius—if you don't object to having a genius for a brother."

He was passing on. Then he paused and took hold of Mr. Blood's coat lapel.

"Come in here for a minute," he said, and he drew him into the library. "Why don't you——" he said. "Couldn't you be persuaded? The time is really coming for earnest men. I was talking to a young man only this afternoon—young Debenham, Whitecliffe's son. He's got talents, you know. And honesty. But no enthusiasm. Now, why couldn't you help us? You belong to the party."

"Only platonically," Mr. Blood got in.

"If you'd stand now—I don't mind telling you that there will be an opportunity."

"I'd rather you didn't tell me," Mr. Blood said. "Not as a matter of confidence. If, that is to say, you are going to tell me there will be a bye-election in North Kent."

The Chancellor said: "Ah!" Immediately afterwards he returned to his theme.

"Of course, this isn't officially my job. But I feel the necessity—out of office hours, as it were—the necessity of preaching a revival of spirit. The old-

fashioned spirit—that's what we want. The fine old determined Whiggism."

"Oh, great Scott!" Mr. Blood exclaimed. "My dear sir, I'm not a Whig!"

"You mayn't be," the Chancellor said, "but you have the spirit. I don't mind saying that I am not astonished if you think politics is dirty work. I'm not astonished that you stand out of it. I can't really blame you. I'm going myself—I'm an enthusiast, you know—to try to clean things up. We've too many indifferents and too many men merely on the make. I'm going to try to change it. That's why I'm looking out for men."

"You're looking out for trouble, I should say," Mr. Blood said. "You can't keep back the Atlantic with torrents of eloquence, not any more than you can with a mop. It's coming; it's going to sweep you over. I've got a chap."

The Chancellor did not know Mr. Blood very well. He had addressed him rather on the chance of making an adherent, for he really was contemplating, not a split in the Cabinet, but great developments when certain of the older colleagues should have died or gone into the House of Peers. A perfectly honourable man, he had no idea at all of working against colleagues with whom he disagreed. But he saw a time coming when he must, by the mere process of exhaustion, become the dominating personality of the Government. And he was determined, when that day came, to have done with compromise. For that reason he had addressed Mr. Blood. But it certainly astonished him a little to be addressed, in turn, with so little personal deference. He did not much resent it: he was accustomed to the want of personal respect inseparable

from a democratic following. Had he been a minister of the Opposition, he would certainly never have been there, in a club, talking to just any commoner. And he felt it to be rather odd that the person who thus addressed him was not a working man, who need not be expected to be respectful, but a member of the Whig governing class who ought to have a respect for place. He said only :

" Sweep me over, you said ? " And then, " Sweep *me* over ! "

" Oh well ! " Mr. Blood answered, " that is how I feel it. But it's not much good saying it. What else did you want to say to me ? I'm quite at your service."

The Chancellor said : " Oh ! " in quite an accentuated voice, and caught at his knee. " It's a pain ! Hang it ! Quite an acute pain. I've had it once or twice. I ought to see a doctor. I beg your pardon." He reflected for a moment, said " The pain was really very severe ! " and then recollected his propaganda.

" The point really is," he continued, " that we do want that earnest tone restored to political life. And, if you determinedly refuse to take advantage of a career that I am perfectly certain you would—eh, eh—adorn, you might at least do a great deal, in the way of speaking to our younger members. You could give them the benefit of your weight and experience. Even of your stake in the country. There is, for instance, the young man we were mentioning—Lord Whitecliffe's son. And one or two others. If you could make a little circle round you."

Mr. Blood said : " My God ! " But the Chancellor, who was no particular hand at understanding personalities, was getting into his stride.

" If you could just do it," he said, " you might

become an influence. There are such things as influences—hidden forces. You see, young Debenham. He's quite unformed. But one might do something if the ideas were put into his head—the words into his mouth."

"You mean," Mr. Blood asked, "that you might find him a useful minister—that sort of chap—or even figure-head, if you could work some of the leading ideas into him."

The minister said:

"Yes, yes, that's what I mean! I hope I can count on your co-operation?"

"I don't think you can, you know," Mr. Blood said. "It's not exactly my job."

The Chancellor gave a slight, new shudder of pain.

"My knee's really very painful," he said. And then he added: "I've got to speak in ten minutes. We're getting through the Home Office vote. I must really see a doctor. Who's a good man? Croswood? Spiers? But you just think of what I have been saying. You'll see it's overwhelming truth—that what we want is enthusiasm—if you reflect." And he hobbled rather awkwardly from the room.

Mr. Blood walked obligingly beside him down the slippery marble steps into the hall. He was afraid that the Chancellor might fall down, but that distinguished statesman managed without accident to hobble into the hall, and at the same moment Mr. Blood perceived Mr. Debenham entering from the street. The Chancellor hooked his hand into the arm of one of the porters. He nodded, still amiably, to Mr. Blood, and remarked:

"You'll remember to give your brother my message?" and was conducted by the porter into his waiting cab.

Mr. Debenham approached Mr. Blood.

"Well, he's a gallant spirit!" Mr. Blood ejaculated, with his eyes upon the Chancellor's back. "Do you mind coming upstairs with me and talking to a man called Garstein."

"Garstein!" Mr. Debenham exclaimed. "Good God!"

"Well," Mr. Blood answered amiably, "you didn't expect the other side to be long after you, with the Byefleet election coming on and all?"

Again Mr. Debenham said "Good God!" He appeared to grow exceedingly excited. "We can't talk about that here," he said. "Not in the hall with all these people about. Just come in here a minute. I daresay you don't know how important secrecy is at this moment."

Mr. Blood followed him, though he remarked as he did so:

"I don't like this lobbying, you know. The Chancellor's pulled me in here; now it's you! And there's that fellow upstairs. I'm not used to your House of Commons manners. I like sitting in a chair and talking, not standing in a draught and whispering."

They were by that time actually standing in the doorway of the reading room, and Mr. Debenham was preparing to whisper.

"You've got to keep that secret," he said, "you've got to!"

"I've got to do nothing of the sort," Mr. Blood said; "and I am not going to."

"You got it out of the Chancellor in confidence," Mr. Debenham said. "I only told it him this afternoon myself. I suppose I oughtn't to have. But, hang it! if a whip can't tell the Chancellor of the Exchequer things——"

" He's a most dangerous enthusiast," Mr. Blood said. " You can't afford to tell him anything. But, as a matter of fact, he didn't tell me. I wouldn't let him ; I knew it before. Redmaynes are down to thirty-two and a quarter. Don't you see that that's enough to make any man of ordinary intelligence know that Cronk would have to bolt ? "

Mr. Debenham glanced round the reading room. The room was completely empty in a dim light reflected from the backs of books. He let himself go, exclaiming in quite a loud voice :

" Oh, I say ! But, hang it all ! what a confounded mess ! There's the Byefleet cat out of the bag ; there's the Opposition on to you. What's to be done ? What on earth's to be done ? "

Mr. Blood said soothingly :

" My good man, the Chancellor was just telling me that he'd marked you out for promotion on condition that you sat at my feet and and took my advice."

" Oh, that's likely ! " Mr. Debenham groaned ; " but then, what are you doing ? You're on our side, aren't you ? What's it all about ? "

" What it's all about," Mr. Blood said, " works out at this. The Chancellor really seems to regard you as a possible Prime Minister in years to come—a sort of dummy figure that he'd pull the strings of."

" But what's all this got to do with Byefleet ? " Mr. Debenham mumbled.

" Just this," Mr. Blood answered : " I've got a Jew—a perfectly honest Jew of about your age and weight and intelligence. And I want to run him for that particular office of profit and emolument under the Crown. The Chancellor bulks too largely in your party to give my Jew a show there. They couldn't run together.

The Chancellor's old-fashioned with his enthusiasms. As old-fashioned as you. Perfectly honest and perfectly decent, but quite hopeless. A doomed type. You've got to go, you fellows. That's why my Jew will be putting up as Opposition candidate for Byefleet to-morrow."

"Oh, but I say!" Mr. Debenham ejaculated once more. "I don't understand what you mean. I thought you belonged to our party. I don't understand what it all means."

"Let's sit down," Mr. Blood answered. And, walking towards an enormous card bearing the word "Silence" that was hung round a marble column, he sat down beneath it in an arm-chair, that permitted him to have a view of the stairs through the open door. Mr. Debenham sat down in the armchair beside him.

"The real trouble is," Mr. Blood said, "that you're too honest. I don't much care which side my chap goes up on. Both parties of you are such a painful lot of cadgers that no decent man could possibly subscribe to either of your programmes. So it doesn't matter one bean which of you my chap favours. The only trouble is that your side have sent you to me, and you're a decent person. The other side have sent this Garstein, and he's a swine!"

"But I don't understand," Mr. Debenham said. "You don't want to do business with a swine."

"I just do," Mr. Blood said, "because he'll give me the sort of bargain that I want. You wouldn't let my man, in return for a decent sum of money, put up as your candidate, and then vote against you whenever he didn't like your measures?"

"I certainly shouldn't," Mr. Debenham said. "It has been done by our party, and some of us favour its

being done now. But it's a beastly sort of trick. Either a man is a straight-forward, thick-and-thin supporter of democratic ideas, or he isn't. If he isn't we don't want him."

"Then you don't want Mr. Fleight," Mr. Blood said. "I respect you for it morally, but you simply can't do with him."

"You couldn't," Mr. Debenham almost pleaded, "let him be a straight party man for just one Parliament —until he became acquainted with the real state of public affairs? We'd let him in on those conditions. If he chose to go against us after that, we shouldn't grumble. We are not so hard and fast, not so unreasonable."

"It can't be done," Mr. Blood answered; "you forget that my man is perfectly honest, and we've got quite strong views between us. On certain questions he couldn't vote with you without being a cad. And my man isn't going to be a cad once in his existence—that's what it comes to."

Mr. Debenham got up. His face was quite hard and rather disagreeable.

"Then it *isn't* any good!" he exclaimed. "I'm not going to do anything to endanger party discipline. We've got to be absolutely compact. Like a regiment of soldiers.

"By Jove!" Mr. Blood said, "how you have caught the Chancellor's contagion! You're speaking like him, and you're doing your very best to look like him."

"That's because he's perfectly right," Mr. Debenham said. "I've had my doubts about him; but when I hear cynicism like yours it makes me feel that he is, by comparison, a man to lay down one's life for."

Mr. Blood suddenly laughed quite brilliantly.

"Well, you *have* caught it!" he said.

"I can't stand cynicism," Mr. Debenham answered. "Intolerance is all right by comparison."

Mr. Blood exclaimed:

"Wait a minute!" and suddenly got quite quickly out of his chair. He moved across the dim room at a rapid pace towards the brilliantly-lit staircase which the fat, black form of Mr. Garstein could be seen to be descending. He looked like a pig shuffling down erect, and his face of a New York Tammany boss was distorted with rage. The Opposition had indeed imported him from Philadelphia to work up their organisation under the nominal supervision of a sleepy lieutenant-colonel, the most intimate friend of the Leader of the Opposition. His fat cheeks quivered with fury when Mr. Blood approached him on the broad, white marble of the steps.

"Here I say!" he exclaimed, "what the hell do you mean? What do you think you are, to keep me waiting like this?"

Mr. Blood said:

"You're a tradesman. You've got something to sell. I was getting my candidate for you. The Byefleet division will be in the market to-morrow and I command the candidate worth twenty millions. Remember that, and remember your place, too."

Mr. Garstein paused with his hand on the polished marble balustrade:

"What's that?" he asked. "Byefleet? To-morrow? I say! But you couldn't expect me not to get into a temper at your keeping me waiting so long."

"You couldn't expect me," Mr. Blood said, "to turn the world upside down for your benefit without keeping you waiting ten minutes. You'd better come in here."

Mr. Garstein followed Mr. Blood into the reading room. He was wheezing slightly, but he contrived to bring out the words :

" That's all right ! That's all right ! "

Three-quarters of an hour later Mr. Garstein, with an expression on his face resembling that of a wholesale hog-merchant who has just satisfactorily concluded a substantial deal in pork, was buttoning a cheque into the left-hand pocket of his top-coat. He went away down the brightly-lit marble staircase. Mr. Fleight was looking gloomily at the blotting-paper on a table at which he sat. The cheque book which he had just used still lay open before him.

" So now," Mr. Blood said, " you're the official Opposition candidate for Byefleet in Kent. You'll have to come down with me to Corbury to-morrow morning, or better still, to-night. I suppose you can get your things ready ? "

" I suppose I can," Mr. Fleight said gloomily. " I've got sets of things already packed for when I want to travel."

" We'd better go in your car," Mr. Blood said ; " it's probably quicker than mine. You Jews always manage to have the fastest cars in the country. And we'd better get to bed as early as we can so as to start work fresh to-morrow. You'll have a tremendous lot to do."

Mr. Fleight said :

" I suppose I shall." And his expression was so depressed that he seemed to be on the point of tears.

" It was rather interesting what that fellow said," Mr. Blood went on, " about an uncertain member's being of more value to the Opposition than to the Government."

"I daresay it was," Mr. Fleight said. "I'm afraid I wasn't listening."

"I don't know why you should listen if you don't want to," Mr. Blood replied. "But what it amounted to was this: A Government has to have a solid vote that it can rely on, just because one snap division may turn them out. So they can't afford to have wobblers. But when it comes to the Opposition they don't care how often you vote for the Government as long as you can be trusted to vote for them every now and then in a snap division. You don't appear to be listening to me, either."

Mr. Fleight continued to say nothing at all. And then Mr. Blood addressed him, not at all unkindly:

"My good chap, she won't cut her throat; you needn't have the least fear of it."

## VII

"GENTLEMEN"—

Mr. Aaron Rothweil was addressing his supporters in the Public Room of the George Inn at Byefleet, in North Kent. For the purposes of his hurried candidature he was stopping with Mr. Blood, at Corbury.

He was perfectly calm, slightly depressed, and so dressed in shiny black clothes that his uncommanding aspect gave him exactly the appearance of any one of the two-hundred shop-keepers whom he was addressing. He had been speaking for about ten minutes. He had given his attention hitherto to the party matters of the day. Now he was to take another line.

He looked down upon Mr. Blood. Mr. Blood was seated in the front row below his feet. Beside him, blonde, large, and more than usually German, was Miss Macphail, who had come down to see how he was getting on, as well as to interview him for the third time for the *Halfpenny Weekly*, whose editorial duties she contrived to combine with the assistant editorship of the new review. That was rapidly coming into existence. Mr. Blood nodded slightly, and Mr. Rothweil gathered from this that Mr. Blood appreciated his performance as far as it had gone.

In the same slightly depressed tones Mr. Rothweil continued:

"It will thus appear that I am absolutely staunch and profess a sound loyalty to the programme of our

great party." He went on to say that it was the historic party as to which every member, being ever so humble, must feel with immense pride, in belonging to it, he formed a part of one of those illustrious bodies which have so enormously influenced the majesty and the tradition of an historic empire.

There was the sound of very great applause in the room. Mr. Blood whispered sarcastically to Miss Macphail :

" Not bad, that ! Considering that it is the first speech I have written for fifteen years."

" Yes, it's good stuff," Miss Macphail said ; " but I wish he would get a little more animation into his manner."

Mr. Blood answered only : " Listen ! "

At the same time, Mr. Rothweil was continuing, whilst bound to his party by that immense spirit of loyalty which, he might be permitted to say, made them all brothers in heart and spirit, he had also his private aspirations. And, since he was now come amongst them for the first time, and, since he had already assured them that he was perfectly sound upon the great questions of Social Reform, Imperial Preference, and all the other planks of their programme, it seemed to be his duty—and was it not for that very purpose that they were gathered there together ?—to let them know, " If I may be permitted to use a phrase which is slang, but one which is in common use between simple man and man—to let you know what sort of fellow I am."

There were many sounds of approval in the hall, and one enthusiastic gentleman, to whom the landlord of the " George " had been unusually generous, exclaimed in a confident voice :

" One of the best ! "

Mr. Rothweil continued that he was not going to be

unduly modest. It would be utterly ridiculous for him to come there and ask for their support if he couldn't claim to have pondered more deeply than most people upon the questions of the day. He did not mean to claim any very special gifts; he simply meant to say that he was one of the leisured class. Providence had been good to him, and he had had the time, which many men, better than himself, had simply not had, to devote to thinking about the questions of their day. "That is why I stand before you, and upon that fact I base my claim to your suffrages."

Mr. Rothweil's agent, a local solicitor with a rather stupid, blonde face, but full of physical vigour, was seated on the platform next but one to Mr. Rothweil. The chair was taken by the Earl of Barryowen, a fair, sleepy, young man, whose seat, though it was always let, was in the immediate neighbourhood. The gentleman who had exclaimed "One of the best!" now exclaimed "And a damn good claim, too!" And the agent said "Hush!" because Mr. Blood was talking to Miss Macphail in a whisper so loud that it reached their ears upon the platform.

England, Mr. Rothweil was continuing, compared with the showy foreign nations, had always been a little dowdy. It isn't what you have on your back makes you the man you are; it's what you have in your stomach; it's whether your heart is in the right place. That was the secret of England's greatness. Society was on the wrong track; it was too much led astray by wealth and show. And Mr. Rothweil raised his voice to say:

"I don't mean to say that there should be no wealthy people. I'm wealthy myself. I'm wearisomely wealthy."

It was at this point that Gilda Leroy and her mother entered and found seats in the back part of the hall below the dark gallery.

"I'm wearisomely wealthy," Mr. Rothweil repeated. They probably knew what he got his wealth from. He had eleven thousand employees—a whole town. They were extremely well paid, they were extremely well lodged, they had shares in the business on co-operative lines. He didn't think that there was a single thing that could be said against him as an employer of labour. If there were anything he would try to have the defect remedied. He had never spent a tenth of his income.

Mr. Rothweil's voice suddenly became lower: "I am just a man like yourselves," he said, "with the simplest possible tastes. I don't really know how to enjoy money. If I had my way—if I had my way—I should like to keep a small shop."

Mr. Blood said suddenly: "Hullo, that wasn't in the speech I wrote!"

"I should like to keep a small shop," Mr. Rothweil repeated. "I should like to sit in peace and quiet behind the counter of an evening and have customers come in and buy things by the ha'porth, and know that every ha'porth that I sold meant a farthing of profit. That's what I should like to do. That's what's really in my blood, because it's no good making a secret of the fact. And in a small shop in an evening, one would feel so extraordinarily restful. That's what I should really like, and I tell you this because I daresay you will understand."

"That's a silly, rotten thing to have said!" Miss Macphail commented. "He's let himself down in the eyes of these people."

"Oh, I don't know," Mr. Blood answered; "he's got

a nice, modest way of speaking, it ought to make us like him."

Miss Gilda Leroy at the back of the hall said to her mother :

" It's your shop that he's talking about. You know how he comes and sits behind the counter of an evening."

" There can't be any doubt about it that it's him, Gilda," Mrs. Leroy said, " though why he should look as though he was sickening for a gumboil it passes me to understand."

. . . . . .

That was on the Monday.

On the Saturday at nine o'clock, Gilda Leroy had put up the shutters of the tobacco stall that is on the left hand, up-platform of High Street, Kensington, Underground Station. She took all the silver with her in a little wallet, left the coppers in the till, and carefully folded into a bundle, which she carried under her arm, three halfpenny morning papers and two halfpenny evening ones. They had been given to her at her request in return for a damaged packet of cigarettes by the ticket collector. She took the 9.3 train to Victoria and then walked through the shabby streets that shelter between the opposing towers of the Abbey and the Cathedral.

The twilight was still in the dusky skies ; the walking took her nearly always over pieces of wrapping paper and banana peels, and the sawdust and detritus that fell from the costermongers' stalls, lining all the roadways. She was brushed against by wives who were seeking to drag their husbands out of public houses; she brushed against mothers holding several babies for their neighbours, who were inside drinking. Little boys ran against her knees in escaping from the wives of coster-

mongers whom they had insulted, and a continuous cry went up from the meat stalls, fruit stalls, and stalls for the sale of cheap tin ware. The girl, however, in her cheap black dress was, upon the one hand, riding in a barouche with a powdered footman, who would call her "My lady" when he descended from the box; she was in the park, the cynosure of all the eyes of all the idlers that she had ever read of in the penny novelettes in whose almost exclusive society her lonely days were passed. Or, on the other hand, she was walking over Waterloo Bridge just before she threw herself into the river. On an ordinary Saturday evening she was very deft at getting through crowds; as it was, she saw nobody and stumbled against many people.

She went into her mother's shop, which was a downstairs parlour in a whitewashed blind-alley, the other houses in it being occupied by a chimney sweep, a turncock and a midwife. She placed her wallet upon the counter, and she took her hat off and placed it upon the counter, too. She knew that her mother would be very busy that evening and could not be expected to come into the back parlour. Her mother was just wrapping up three red herrings in a half sheet of the *Morning Post*, and was talking to Mrs. Kerridge, the widow of a bus-conductor, about her rheumatism and her late husband's rheumatism, and the indigestion of Mrs. Mason, who lived over the fish shop three doors round the corner. Mrs. Edwards, who was a charlady, had also to be served with four pounds of onions, and had to impart the information that her old man, who was the under foreman of a van-yard, always expected to have tripe for his Sunday dinner. Mrs. Leroy said that, for her part, she favoured cow-heel, and they began debating as to the respective merits of these foods, the one being held to

be more filling and the other lying less heavily upon the stomach. Mrs. Leroy was an old, square woman, with blue eyes, pendulous jaws and dead white hair, that was parted flatly in the middle of her round head.

Her shop subsisted in its corner by reason of the conservatism of poor neighbourhoods. She sold penny yellow and black tea mugs that came from a pottery down Bristol way—tea mugs of a pattern one hundred and fifty years old. She sold brown moist sugar that was nearly black, and had something the flavour of liquorice, such as none of the new stores sold or would have known where to buy. She sold red herrings from a factory on the east coast that had been established two hundred and fifty years, and that had only three or four customers. She sold medicinal herbs in packets and cooked pig's-trotters—which she boiled herself—as well as penny broad-sheet ballads that were hung up all over the shop, and onions from Brittany that depended in long ropes all down the window. Her profits from the establishment, except at Christmas and about the fifth of November, when she sold fireworks, were seldom more than seventeen and six, and never less than nine shillings a week. In return she was the dictatress of opinions and the wise woman of Henry Street, James Street, and Charles and Augusta Mews, Westminster.

Gilda Leroy took her wallet, her hat, and the bundle of papers from the counter and went into the little parlour behind the shop. The parlour was so small that, by standing in the middle of it with her arms outstretched, Gilda Leroy could touch the glass rolling-pin over the mantelpiece on one side of the room, and the china cupboard upon the other. Her father, the foreman turncock for that district, a man with grizzly side-whiskers and a Newgate fringe, was sitting inertly

in a stuffed armchair. His boots were on a piece of brown paper which Mrs. Leroy had put there to save the carpet; his knees were spread widely apart, and both his palms were upon his knees. When his daughter entered he stood up with something like a grunt of contentment.

"You're late," he said. "I'm going to the 'Three Tuns.'"

Mr. Leroy, though he had worked for upwards of forty years in London, was still a countryman, and he dreaded very much that his daughter would be run over or abducted in returning from her tobacco stall. So that, although he was chairman of the Club of Jovial Guzzlers that met every Saturday night at the "Three Tuns," he never went to take the chair until he had seen his daughter safe at home.

Miss Leroy went into the little scullery, lit the gas-ring, and placed upon it a tin mug filled with cocoa that her mother had set ready for her. When it was warmed she returned to the parlour, poured the cocoa into a cup, and then, returning to the scullery, she filled the mug with cold water so that it might be easy to wash out. She sat down at the parlour table. It was laid with a blue and red duster upon which her mother had placed a thin piece of cold beef, a jar of extremely yellow pickles and a large cottage loaf. The light that had been in the midsummer sky had almost entirely faded out. Gilda Leroy lit a candle in a tin flat candlestick and began to read a paper, printed with very small print and covered in pink. She buried herself deep in the adventures of a governess who had opalescent eyes and a belted earl. She undid her boots as she was reading and loosened them upon her feet. She identified herself thoroughly and rapturously with the personality of the

governess. It was true that the governess was five foot eleven in height, whereas she was not five foot six, and could certainly not fling out showers of diamond notes from a grand piano. Still, she could play "Home Sweet Home" upon the harmonium that stood beneath the window and contained a vox humana stop. And she had just arrived at the point when, the governess' opalescent eyes having become suffused with a grey light, the belted earl said:

"Ha, by Jove! Will you place my coronet upon your brows?"

It was enormously moving; Gilda Leroy seemed to feel in the air something religious, something almost sacred. And then Mrs. Leroy came in and said:

"He's in the shop. Are you coming out or shall I let him come in here? It isn't me he comes to talk to."

"Shut the door," Miss Leroy said. "*I* want to talk to you."

"Then," her mother exclaimed, "he'll be selling somebody methylated spirits for nasturtium vinegar."

"That doesn't matter," her daughter said abstractedly.

"Not matter!" Mrs. Leroy ejaculated. "Selling methylated spirits after dark costs you forty shillings or a month."

Miss Leroy unfolded one from her bundle of papers; she turned over a page, found a portrait, pointed to it with her finger and said:

"Who's that?"

Mrs. Leroy regarded the rough block of an undistinguished gentleman with a rather thick moustache. She read the inscription beneath.

"It seems to me," she said, "that it's Mr. Aaron Rothweil, Opposition candidate for the bye-election at Byefleet."

" But who does it remind you of ? " Gilda Leroy asked.

" Don't remind me of anybody," Mrs. Leroy said, " so much as the young gentleman in wax that's in Mr. Cluft's window with : ' Startling ! Seventy-seven and sixpence ' pinned on his bosom."

" You've no heart ! " Miss Leroy exclaimed. " Look at the tremble I'm in."

" Another Marquis ? " Mrs. Leroy asked.

Gilda rapidly unfolded another paper and found another portrait.

" Then who's that ? " she asked.

" Seems to be the same man," Mrs. Leroy said composedly, " though with that spot in the corner of the eye it reminds me of the other gentleman in Mr. Cluft's window—the one that was marked : ' The latest—thirty-seven shillings ' until last Monday, when he came out as : ' Alarming sacrifice ! One Guinea.' "

With vehement actions Miss Leroy opened the *Evening Sun* and the *Halfpenny Weekly :*

" Who's that and that ? " she asked triumphantly. Mrs. Leroy looked at the portrait in the *Evening Sun* with patient boredom. She was used to her daughter's flights of fancy, and this portrait represented exactly the same aspect of Mr. Rothweil except that the nose, instead of the right eye, was defective. Her glance therefore, passed to the *Halfpenny Weekly*, which presented her with a full-length portrait of Mr. Rothweil in a Panama hat. He was standing in a garden looking profoundly depressed, and it was this air of dejection which really arrested Mrs. Leroy's attention. She said " Hum ! " and her daughter, aware that the portrait had made some impression, exclaimed :

" Just read what's printed underneath ! "

And Mrs. Leroy read, printed in very black letters :

"This is the latest portrait of Mr. Aaron Rothweil, the Opposition candidate for Byefleet. It was taken in the gardens of Palatial Hall, Hampstead, the magnificent residence erected by the late Mr. Aaron Rothweil at a cost of £434,000, and which contains the Norfolk Rembrandt and the celebrated columns of twisted porphyry."

"You see," Gilda Leroy said, "there's Palatial Hall mentioned. Isn't it an extraordinary mystery? He says his name is Fleight. And when we looked up his name in the telephone directory we discovered that there was only two Fleights—one, Mrs. Fleight, who was a court dressmaker, and the other, Mr. A. R. Fleight, of Palatial Hall, Hampstead. Now, the *Halfpenny Weekly* says that the owner of Palatial Hall is Mr. Aaron Rothweil, and it gives a portrait of him as being that gentleman. What am I to think?"

"I don't know what you're to think," Mrs. Leroy answered. "I should just ask him."

Gilda, however, exclaimed hastily:

"Oh, no! I shouldn't like to hurt his poor feelings. I shouldn't like him to think I was spying on him. I'm not that sort."

"But you're spying on him now, in a manner of speaking," Mrs. Leroy said. "The best thing you can do is to make a clean breast to him. Ask him who he is and what his intentions are. If you don't, I shall. Two of your sisters have gone wrong along of this sort of thing, and I'm going to keep you respectable."

Miss Leroy's tone became one of abject entreaty.

"Oh no, ma!" she pleaded. "Oh! Don't, ma! Don't go and break my heart! I don't want him to be offended and go, and I don't want his poor feelings to be hurt. You let him alone. He isn't what they call

'enterprising' in the books. Why, you can't say that he's really even walking out with me. The most he ever does is to come and chat with me at the stall about the price of tobacco and why there's a much bigger profit on Convolvulus cigarettes than on Strauss and Skinner's, though the one's tenpence a dozen and the other twopence-halfpenny for ten, with a picture of a historic house thrown in. And he hasn't even been near the stall for over a fortnight. And it's the first time he's been in the shop for ever so long, and now you want to break my heart, asking him questions and driving him away."

"Well, my girl," Mrs. Leroy said, "you'll go your own way in spite of me, and if you get into mischief you've time enough to do it while you're out of the house, so it doesn't seem my line to interfere with a young man who keeps you at home instead of gadding about. But I'll tell you this—if you think this man's a gentleman you can knock that straight out of your head."

"I was always certain he was a gentleman," Miss Leroy said; "he behaves just exactly as they do in my books, and if he likes to come to a place like this incognito, isn't that also the sort of thing a gentleman does in my books? Isn't it exactly what Sir Purefoy Beaufort does in 'Won by Waiting'? And if he's going to behave like a gentleman I'm going to behave like a lady."

Mrs. Leroy said: "Oh, la la!"

"I'm going," Miss Leroy continued determinedly, "to behave as the ladies do in my books. They're all kind and tender and high-minded and, in the sort of situation I'm in, do you suppose that any one of those ladies would have spied upon him? I'm not spying upon him; I'm not going to use any knowledge I obtain

as a screw to get something out of him. If it wasn't indecent to say it before you're an engaged young lady I should say I love him passionately, and I'm certain I should drown myself if he went away. That I'm certain of, but if you think that I'm going to use any knowledge I have of him as a means of sticking him to me—why, all I can say is Strauss and Skinner will be amalgamated with the Convolvulus people before that happens. And that's impossible."

"Well, I'm sure it's highly creditable of you," Mrs. Leroy said. She opened the door for a minute and peered into the shop. "Now, Mr. Fleight," she exclaimed, through the opening, "I can't have you selling that amount of cow-heel to Mrs. Degas for less than sixpence halfpenny. It can't be done. If she has six small children I've had seven, though four of them are in the churchyard, and I can't afford to sell things below cost price. Of course, if you like to make it up to the till I can't say anything against it, though how a young man like you, who appears to be of a quiet disposition and ought to be saving up to support a wife in comfort, can throw his money away like that passes me. I don't see, while you're about it, why you shouldn't pull down the whole street and build us palaces with marble walls and these here painted ceilings that you see in Lyons' coffee shops, at the same rent we're paying and with the rates taken off, and a Saturday night beano chucked in cost free. That'd be doing the thing handsome." She shut the door upon the reply of Mrs. Degas, who was exclaiming in high tones that her six pore little children would have their pore little bellies filled for the first time for three months, and blessing the kind gentleman and Mrs. Leroy most sincerely.

"And a stupid sort of fool he is," Mrs. Leroy said to

her daughter when the door was closed. " Full of these notions out of books like you. With how he preaches that it's our duty to give a tenth of our profits to the poor. And I bet he's been looking through my little book of accounts for the last three weeks, and I bet he'll be giving a tenth of my profits out of his own pocket to that Mrs. Degas and Mrs. Epstern and Mrs. Higham and others of the chosen people that chooses to come in."

" Oh, mother ! " Miss Leroy said, " I can't understand how you dare talk to him as you do."

" Well, I'm not going to chuck myself over Waterloo Bridge if he goes away," Mrs. Leroy said. " That makes a difference."

" You haven't any heart," Gilda said.

" God bless the girl ! " Mrs. Leroy exclaimed good-temperedly ; " what does she want out of me now ? "

" I want to know," Gilda answered, " what I'm to do ? "

" I should have thought," Mrs. Leroy retorted, " that you would have known out of your books. I'm bound to say that, if I have thought it a waste of time, your for ever reading and reading instead of having a bit of knitting or of needlework in your hand, yet it's made you gentler and better mannered, and better behaved than any of your sisters ever was, and sometimes I think that if Emily and Eliza had read as much as you have it might have kept them straight, though I never was one to hold with book-learning."

" But what am I to do, ma ? " Miss Leroy asked. " What does it all mean ? "

" Ah ! That's it ! " Mrs. Leroy said. " You've got your knowledge from reading the gentry's books, and I've got mine from living in the gentry's houses, though it's twenty-five years and more since I was in service.

And if you want to know who I think your Mr. Fleight is, why he's probably that there Rothweil's groom of the chambers."

"But why is he so like him?" Miss Leroy asked.

"That's just what I was going to tell you," Mrs. Leroy answered. "Sir Pompey Munro, that I was with for fifteen years, he had a groom of the chambers called Brickwall; and Brickwall was as like Sir Pompey as two peas, though much better dressed and more distinguished. Because why? Mr. Brickwall was Sir Pompey's bastard brother. And what I was going to tell you was that it was Mr. Brickwall's name that was in the telephone directory, because Sir Pompey had a horror of being rung up, and all his friends knew Mr. Brickwall's name was there and Mr. Brickwall had to have his name there because he did all Sir Pompey's business. And if you ask me who I think Mr. Fleight is, why it's just that he's Mr. Rothweil's groom of the chambers."

"But he doesn't look like a groom," Miss Leroy said. "He hasn't got bandy legs and he never smells of horses."

"Well, a groom of the chambers never sees a horse as likely as not," Mrs. Leroy said. "He's a sort of six times upper butler. But if that doesn't satisfy you I'll tell you what you'll do. You go down to Byefleet on Monday."

"Where's Byefleet?" Miss Leroy asked.

"It's a country place," her mother answered, "in Kent."

"Oh, but I couldn't go down into the country," Miss Leroy said. "It's so lonely. You never know that you won't be murdered on those solitary roads."

"Pack of nonsense!" Mrs. Leroy said resignedly. "I suppose it means that you want me to go with you?"

"But what are we going to go for?" her daughter asked.

"Oh, good Lord!" Mrs. Leroy ejaculated. "Whoever came across such innocent ignorance; but then you've never been through an election as I've been through a dozen in the houses I've served in. If this here election at Byefleet is coming off on Saturday this Mr. Rothweil will be holding sixteen meetings a day—all over the place. And you'll get a look at him and know all about him. If your Mr. Fleight is Mr. Rothweil he'll be the candidate, and if he's really the groom of the chambers, why, he'll be somewhere about looking after the candidate's comfort, and you're pretty certain to run against him."

In the shop they began to talk about the obligations that wealth confers upon its owner. This came about because a Mr. Posnit, a solicitor's clerk, came into the shop with a basket on his arm and there completed his Saturday night's purchasing, since Mrs. Leroy sold brown sugar and her special brand of red herrings at a cheaper rate even than that at which they could be purchased from the costermongers' stalls or the cheapest tradesmen in the neighbourhood. When he had gone Mrs. Leroy addressed Mr. Fleight, who sat behind the counter near the window, gloomy and silent, and her daughter who, quite as gloomy and quite as silent, was leaning on the angle of the counter just in front of the parlour door. It didn't, she said, appear to be right that Mr. Posnit, who was a gentleman and lived in rooms of his own, should demean himself by purchasing in the cheapest market. She herself had seen him going along Victoria Street to work in a top hat and a frock coat. Of course, she wouldn't have said that

to Mr. Posnit, because trade was trade, and she couldn't afford to damage her own. But wealth was wealth, too, Mrs. Leroy said, and it was the duty of the middle classes and such to buy at the stores, and of the real swells to go to the best shops with the large plate-glass windows, where an apple that looked as if it were made out of soap cost as much as sixpence. For everybody had to live, and how was the expensive tradesman to be kept going if the real swells didn't patronise him, or them there stores, if the middle classes didn't go to them but came to shops like hers where you got things really cheap and really genuine? Live and let live was what she always said, and wealth had its obligations.

Mr. Fleight burst out with:

"Oh, that's all nonsense!" Wealth was really a bore, so why should it carry any obligations at all. What was wealth? There wasn't any amusement about it. There wasn't even any romance, because you couldn't ever see it. You might be a millionaire twice over; you might be so wealthy you didn't ever begin to understand how wealthy you were; but you couldn't ever see it. It was a sort of thing that melted all round you and, if you wrote your name on a piece of paper, wealth was somehow transferred to another man. Or, on the other hand, if some other man wrote his name on a piece of paper, wealth might be transferred to you. But that was the bore—it was invisible. And that wasn't any fun for a man. It was better, from the romantic point of view, to have a stocking full of half-crowns hung up the chimney; it was better even to have a till like the one Mrs. Leroy had under the counter, which was pretty full on a Saturday night with small silver in one bowl, and coppers, with fish scales sticking on them, in the other. "For myself," Mr. Fleight con-

cluded, "I'd rather see—if I was a millionaire I'd rather see a good large table covered with pillars of gold sovereigns about three feet high—which might mean, say, £20,000—I'd rather see that than have a hundred thousand in some stocks or shares. But I couldn't, of course—not even if I was as rich as Mr. Morgan."

"But why shouldn't you?" Mrs. Leroy asked, "supposing you were some very rich man—a soap boiler, now? Sir Pompey Munro, where I was in service, he had a strong room in Lowndes Square. Two foot thick the walls was, and it had a circular door that worked like the back end of the big cannons you sometimes see in the picture theatres."

"But he never had much gold there," Mr. Fleight asserted.

"I can't say that he did," Mrs. Leroy said. "He used it for his valuable papers and securities, but I can't say there was ever much gold in it."

"Would you have known?" Mr. Fleight asked.

"Young man," Mrs. Leroy answered, "there was nothing that went on in that house that I didn't know. If he'd had large sums of gold it would have had to be brought in. It would be heavy, in cases. And there was never anything heavy came into my basement but what I knew about it, and about the heaviest thing that ever did come was these here crates of a dozen syphons of soda water. So that settles that!"

"It does exactly settle that," Mr. Fleight exclaimed. "And I'll tell you why it does. Any millionaire that kept £20,000 worth of gold locked up in his house would be considered a lunatic—because, though wealth breeds wealth, sovereigns wouldn't increase in number locked up in a cellar. It wouldn't be safe to do it. It would

be almost good enough to prove you were a lunatic and have you locked up in an expensive asylum whilst your heirs spent your income. And the £20,000 in gold would be put into gilt-edged securities by the commissioners in lunacy. It just simply couldn't be done in secrecy on account of the servants—just because gold is heavy, and you couldn't have big, heavy cases carried into your house without the cook knowing it in the kitchen, and the butler in the pantry, and the upper parlourmaid in the first-floor drawing-room, and my lady's maid enamelling my lady's nose in the boudoir, and the old woman with the large pocket under her skirt who bought the fat from the cook."

"You seem to know a lot about servants," Mrs. Leroy said.

"I do," Mr. Fleight answered grimly. "I have to deal with twenty at a time and they cheat me every minute of the day."

"Now, I suppose," Mrs. Leroy said, "you might be an employment agent. I've often wondered what you did?"

"No, I'm not an employment agent," Mr. Fleight answered. "I've told you a dozen times that I'm a Jew looking for a job."

"That's always the trouble with gentry of your persuasion," Mrs. Leroy said, "if you ain't cut out to be sweated tailors and if you won't lend a shilling on the Monday, to be paid back one and twopence on Saturday night."

"I don't hold with usury," Mr. Fleight said.

"No, I know you don't," Mrs. Leroy answered. "But if you won't do one or the other, you're precious likely to sink without capital. It's a wonder to me that you've kept yourself neat and clean as long as you have."

"I never said I hadn't got capital," Mr. Fleight answered. "If I had told you that it would have been lying. But I've got a job in sight now."

"Well, I hope it's a good one," Mrs. Leroy said.

"Oh!" Mr. Fleight answered, "it's the sort of thing that leads to from five to fifteen thousand a year and, usually, a peerage."

"Now, don't you go and get excited," Mrs. Leroy said. "I've heard tell that them as counts their chickens before they're hatched, drops the whole basketful of eggs and there's nothing but a muddle of yolks to show for their pains, so that you have to wipe the mess up with a shovel and sell it to these here cheap pastrycooks at a penny a dozen for making their nasty cakes."

"Oh, ma!" Miss Leroy said suddenly, "why do you go interrupting the gentleman just when he seemed to be going to tell us something interesting about himself?" She looked yearningly along the counter at Mr. Fleight. "I do hope," she said, "that you're going to like your new career. And I don't suppose we shall see very much more of you."

"I don't suppose you will," Mr. Fleight said; "or perhaps you may. Westminster's not so very far off. And I've told you often enough that I'd rather sit here on a Saturday night when trade's busy than almost anywhere else in the world." He added: "Unless it was sitting under an arch in a hot country and selling Damascus silks, cross-legged. As for enjoying the career that's going to open for me I shan't enjoy it a bit. It's the sort of monkey trick of imitation that's the curse of my race. I don't want to have to beat Christians at their own swindling games. I can do it, but it isn't what I'm fitted for—not what I'm best fitted for. It's a weary sort of nonsense. There's the palm plants and

the marble staircases, and the Christian wife you've purchased, standing at the top in white satin to receive 6,000 guests, whilst the invisible orchestra plays the Preislied out of the 'Meistersingers.'"

"Oh! it sounds like heaven!" Miss Leroy said.

"Sir Pompey," Mrs. Leroy corrected, "didn't have a marble staircase, and her ladyship received inside the drawing room door; and, of course, they wouldn't have a band, they would have thought it vulgar."

"I daresay they would," Mr. Fleight said. "So it would be vulgar. But that's what it is. And your wife has the Duchess of Somebody's pearl tiara that you've bought for her on her brows, and they're drinking Imperial Tokay at a guinea the drop in the supper room, and wondering why you give them raspberry syrup because they can't tell the difference. And you yourself are just the dirty little Jew in the shadow of your wife, grinning and holding out your hand, which more than half the people won't take. And the remainder will be licking your boots because they'll all suppose you've got half the jobs in the kingdom to give away."

"Oh! but aren't you cynical to-night, Mr. Fleight!" Miss Leroy exclaimed delightedly. "I love to hear you talk like that. It makes me almost think you could write a penny novelette if you tried."

For the last ten minutes customers had been scarce in the shop, and suddenly there came a grating rumble from outside the windows.

"That's your father putting up the shutters," Mrs. Leroy said to Gilda. "Why don't you go and help him?"

Gilda rose languidly, but before she had crossed the floor, Mr. Leroy pushed heavily into the shop. He had

a gallon jar of beer in one hand, and he was good-natured but not in the least intoxicated.

"What's the subject of discussion at this meeting?" he asked jovially.

"That's just it!" Mrs. Leroy exclaimed. "It's whether wealth has its obligations, or whether you ought to keep your money in a stocking."

"Of course wealth has its obligations," Mr. Leroy said. "Up at the Club we've been putting our names down for subscriptions for the wife of the under-turncock of the C. division, who died of pneumonia brought on by getting wet at the bursting of a pipe. And my name isn't down for only a shilling neither."

"You're an old fool, father!" Mrs. Leroy said affectionately.

"That's the obligation of wealth," Mr. Leroy exclaimed. "But let's go and have supper." And he slapped the gallon jar complacently down on the counter. "As for whether it's better to keep your money in a stocking, I'll tell you this, my boy—the missus, she trusts her savings to a bank, but as for me, there's a brick in the scullery, and if you turned it over you'd find all my small savings under it."

"Oh! you old fool!" Mrs. Leroy said, with an anxious glance at Mr. Fleight.

"Ah! but," Mr. Leroy continued, "if you turned it over without my leave I'm not a master turncock for nothing, and you'd get a burst of water come out of that hole that'd send you up to the ceiling and drowned you when you come down again."

"Now, if," Mr. Fleight said gloomily, "you'd put your money into my hands I'd undertake to put it into something that would double it three times in the course of the year."

The foreman turncock winked sagaciously.

"Now, if you could put it on to a horse that was a thirty to one cert I wouldn't mind parting with a quid. But when it comes to dabbling in stocks and shares I like the feel of my money too much."

Mr. Fleight got up and walked round the counter to the door.

"You offended?" Mr. Leroy asked with mild astonishment.

"Not a bit," Mr. Fleight answered, "your sentiments are too exactly my sentiments. I'm just going out to stand something for a treat before the public-houses close."

"God bless my soul!" Mrs. Leroy exclaimed, "if I haven't forgotten all about the supper. Come along, Gilda, and help me."

But when Mr. Fleight returned with two bottles of champagne Mr. Leroy said he couldn't abide the stuff after the first mouthful, and, as for Mrs. Leroy, whenever she held a cupful of it to her lips, she burst into such fits of coughing that she had to be slapped on the back with her own shoe, and seriously impeded the conversation of Mr. Leroy and Mr. Fleight, who were talking politics. Gilda Leroy, however, had fetched a tumbler and, whilst she gazed into the depths of the light amber-coloured fluid, she was hypnotised by the little columns of ascending bubbles; she felt that she was standing upon the top of a large marble staircase with decorations that reminded her of a popular tea room. A band was playing rag-time marches and the Intermezzo, she was wearing white satin, and she could feel upon her brow the pressure of the Duchess's tiara formed of enormous pearls. And Mr. Fleight was somewhere in her shadow, only he would look majestic with a broad red ribbon across his shirt front.

After the women had gone to bed Mr. Fleight and Mr. Leroy sat for a long time discussing politics. Mr. Leroy wanted to see the workhouses shut up and all outdoor relief put into the hands of the Salvation Army. He advanced his reasons for this desire whilst Mr. Fleight, desultorily sipping his nauseous public-house champagne, discovered that this liquid tasted comparatively palatable after a supper consisting of very tough cold boiled beef, cucumber that was swimming in herb vinegar and yellow pickles more acrid than anything he could have imagined. He had not been able to swallow a whelk, so that Mrs. Leroy had had three saucerfuls to herself, Gilda having long since discovered that these shell-fish were not things that one could partake of in polite society. Mrs. Leroy's rest was very much disturbed by a vivid dream in which she saw her daughter, Gilda, cut her throat upon the doorstep of a house in Lowndes Square, next door to that of Sir Pompey, whom she had formerly served, which was number 45.

## VIII

MR. BLOOD and his younger twin brother, Reginald, were sitting together, on the Tuesday morning, in the morning room at Corbury. It promised to be a very hot day. The air, after a long period of rain, had become exceedingly clammy and warm, and this warmth the sun, unable to break through the thick lid of clouds covering the valley of Corbury, rendered every minute more and more intense. Corbury, considering that it was only thirty miles away from London, was extraordinarily remote, solitary and noiseless. It stood in a park of about 4,000 rather untidy acres, so that the nearest main road was fully a mile away, and no sounds of the traffic reached the silent house. In the morning room, which was of great size and unreasonable height, all the shutters were closed save for one leaf at the bottom of an enormously high French window. Thus, bright but moted fillets of light fell upon the backs of gilded books in the immensely high bookcases, upon the polished brass andirons in the immensely high fire-place, and a diffused, reflected light was thrown upwards at the immensely distant ceiling. This was divided into six lozenges, each lozenge displaying a pink but faded cherub disporting himself nakedly against a flat blue sky, in the taste of the eighteenth century. In the air of this enormous room there was a faint odour of wormwood and sandalwood.

Both brothers sat absolutely silent, and there was no sound save the faint and distant click

of silver plate from the adjacent breakfast room where the butler was taking away the remains of that meal.

Leaning back in a saddle-bag chair, whose leather was sadly worn and in two places had been scratched into holes by the claws of Mr. Blood's favourite spaniel, called Grecian, Mr. Blood was reflecting deeply upon the mistakes that had been made by the Italians in their Abyssinian campaign. His mind had been brought to bear on the subject by some news the morning paper contained of a disaster to the Italian arms in the campaign that, at that date, that power was conducting against the Arabs behind Tripoli. And, since Mr. Blood would never reflect upon any news of the day when there was any news of a similar character but from ten to twenty years old for him to reflect upon, he was engaged in calling to mind all that he could remember—and that was a great deal—of Adis Abeba. Mr. Reginald Blood, though he was some three-quarters of an hour younger than his brother, yet appeared, by reason of his leanness, his grey beard, and his worn and troubled features, some twenty years older. Mr. Reginald was considering very deeply whether the time had not come to close the bottom panel of the shutters in the south window, and to open the two top ones in the east window itself. It was in summer his self-elected duty to keep the rooms of Corbury cool. The butler would much have preferred to do this, but Mr. Reginald doubted his efficiency. He looked at his watch. It was 11.15. Precisely at 11.17½ the sun would steal round and cast its first rays through the square hole that now let in all the light there was in the room. Mr. Reginald waited, leaning forward over his chronometer, and precisely six seconds before the half minute he sprang for the shutter, closed

it, and then in a more leisurely fashion opened that upon the other side of the room.

"Have you heard," Mr. Blood said, "whether Aviator is any better after being fired?"

"I haven't," Mr. Reginald said, with the air of a man who spoke very seldom, since his voice came from a husky throat.

"I should suggest," Mr. Blood continued, "that you would favour me by going down and taking a look at him. I think it was a mistake to fire him in such hot weather."

"I think it wasn't," Mr. Reginald said.

After a minute of silence he looked at his watch. It marked exactly eighteen and a half minutes past eleven.

"I haven't got time," he said, after making a mental calculation. "It would take me six minutes to get to the home farm, and five minutes to catch up Aviator and examine him, and six minutes more to get back, and I shall have to close all the shutters in the red wing in ten minutes' time and pull the sun-blinds over the back door two and a half minutes later."

"Oh, very well!" Mr. Blood said; "but you might just as well let Lennards do your heat dodging."

"I can't trust him," Mr. Reginald retorted. "The last time I went into Byefleet, in July, he left all the shutters in Aunt Margaret's room open all day."

"That was six years ago," Mr. Blood said. "I should think he'd have had time to learn wisdom since then, even if the row that you kicked up at that date hadn't cured him."

"You don't seem to appreciate," Mr. Reginald began. And they held precisely the same dialogue every day from the beginning of June to the end of September,

whenever there happened to be any sun and whenever Mr. Blood himself happened to be at Corbury. Mr. Reginald had never been outside the gates of the park in the summer for six years—since the lamentable accident to which he had referred. In the winter he hunted a good deal, since the servants could be trusted to keep up the fires. "You don't seem to appreciate what a ticklish job it is, keeping this house cool. It's every bit as bad as trimming the sails of a ship."

Mr. Blood was silenced by this reply, as he had been silenced almost any day during the summers of the six preceding years. And Mr. Reginald stood silent until, just as his hand was wandering to his watch pocket, Mr. Blood said:

"You're still a Papist, aren't you?"

"Of course I'm a Papist," Mr. Reginald said, with some agitation.

"Oh! I didn't know whether you mightn't have changed," Mr. Blood exclaimed negligently. And then, after a pause he asked: "And you still have the same feelings?"

"Exactly the same feelings," Mr. Reginald answered. "How am I going to change?"

"You intend to go on here for the rest of your life?" Mr. Blood asked. "What would you do if I sold Corbury, or let it, or got married or something of that sort?"

"In that case," Mr. Reginald said, "Lennards would leave the place also. And I should go and live with him in the Oast Cottages on the Bensyde Road."

"And supposing," Mr. Blood asked, "I ordered you to do something for your living?"

"I suppose," Mr. Reginald answered, "I should just

have to do it. Of course, if I cut my throat in the middle of it that would be your affair."

"So it would," Mr. Blood answered.

Mr. Reginald lifted his head with an acute air of listening.

"There's a motor coming up the park drive," he said. "It's just over the bridge by the second gate."

Mr. Reginald Blood was a gentleman of great ability, utterly blighted by the most ridiculous divorce affair the world had ever seen. The poor man was known indifferently as Falstaff Blood or Buck-Basket Blood, for his adventures had almost exactly duplicated those of Falstaff. He had had a remarkably promising career as a mathematician at Oxford, and he had just begun to dawn upon the world as a dock engineer when the dreadful thing had occurred. He had built two docks in South America, one in the Straits Settlements and one in Australia, and his design for the new docks at Bristol had just been accepted and got under way when his form was discovered in a large hamper of dirty clothes at Bristol Goods Station. And the mortifying, the horrible aspect of the whole incident was that the supposedly injured husband—a Bristol cheesemonger, with an immense shop in the market-place—failed in his petition for divorce. The lady in the case was able to prove by every possible circumstance of time and alibi that she hadn't been in the house when Mr. Tonks, her husband, had returned suddenly, and Mr. Reginald Blood had thought fit to jump into the large hamper of clothes that was going to Salisbury to be washed.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Reginald Blood had invaded the lady's house without any assignation or appointment—in an uproarious, though not absolutely intoxicated frame of mind. If the husband had succeeded,

Reginald might have come off in the estimation of the world as a licentious, but high-spirited young aristocrat. And that was, without doubt, what he was. But, as the case turned out, he appeared merely abjectly and irredeemably ridiculous. When he had been taken out of the basket he had been so stiff and speechless and so crumpled and dishevelled as well, that, before he had been able to explain himself, he had been carried by three men to the police station and charged with attempting to travel on the railway fraudulently and with the intent to avoid the payment of his fare. On that score he had got off, but his cross-examination at the hands of Mr. Christian, K.C., who represented the husband, as well as at those of Mr. Heron, K.C., who defended the wife, was more frightful than anyone could conceive. The court had seemed to scream with laughter for upwards of two days and a half.

The result had been a most complicated, nervous breakdown. Mr. Blood had taken his brother down to Corbury ; had taken him travelling, and then down to Corbury again. But it had really done poor Reginald very little good at all. Reginald had become a hopelessly morbid monomaniac. Certain vowel sounds made him wince and cringe, and even take to his heels. Thus, once, when in Valetta harbour, the steward of a small steamship had exclaimed, " All clear aft," Mr. Reginald Blood had screamed out and jumped over the side of the boat, because he imagined that the man had exclaimed " Falstaff." And he was unable to hear anyone say : " Chuck me this or that," without imagining the word " buck-basket," and trembling like an overbeaten horse.

Since that day, though it had been eight years ago and almost everybody had forgotten the incident, Mr.

Reginald Blood had lived on at Corbury avoiding the sight of his fellow men and finding his most vigorous occupation in the closing of the shutters. He had accepted the consolations of religion to the extent of becoming a communicant of the Church of Rome ; and that had rendered him even less desirous of again entering a vain world.

Mr. Reginald again pulled out his watch.

" I'm going to the west gallery now," he said, and he went out into the hall. His footsteps in the long uncarpeted corridors could be heard moving far away. There would be the echoing rattle of shutters being closed to, then more footsteps, then another rattle. Into the silent house came the drilling sound of the approach of a motor car, and, after many more noises echoing and reverberating through the immense pile of Corbury, Lennards, the butler, came to the open door and said that Mr. Drupe would like to speak to Mr. Blood. Mr. Blood said :

" Drupe ? Oh ! Let him come in."

Mr. Drupe, the political agent of Mr. Fleight, was introduced. He was a blonde man with a face tanned to the colour of brick dust, little hair upon his head and none upon his cheeks and lips. He was dressed in a long, light brown mackintosh and he was striking his motor gloves together to knock the dust out of them.

" Where's the candidate ? " Mr. Blood said.

" That's just what I was going to ask you," Mr. Drupe ejaculated. He began groping in his pocket delicately as if he disliked the feeling of the dust with which he was covered.

" He never turned up last night," Mr. Blood commented.

"I didn't suppose he would," Mr. Drupe answered. "I had a telegram—if you don't mind I won't produce it, my pockets are too beastly to put my hands into—it says, however: 'Detained by urgent private business. Do the best you can alone or resign my candidature.'"

"Where was it sent from?" Mr. Blood asked.

"It was sent," Mr. Drupe answered, "from the West Strand Post Office at twenty-seven minutes past ten last night."

"Then that's no clue," Mr. Blood said. "He might be in Hampstead and have sent a messenger with it. That Post Office is open all night. Or he might be anywhere else. I'm afraid you'll have either to go on by yourself or resign for him."

"How am I to go on by myself?" Mr. Drupe asked.

"Well, you've got all those front bench speakers coming down to speak for him," Mr. Blood said. "You could put up a fight."

"Ah! but consider my reputation," Mr. Drupe said. "I've never had a thing like this happen to me in all the course of my career."

"But don't you see, Mr. Drupe," Mr. Blood pointed out, "if you could get him in in the face of such adverse circumstances what an immense score it would be for you?"

"But I can't!" Mr. Drupe said. "It's absolutely impossible! Can't you find him? What's his confounded business?"

"It's probably not any business at all," Mr. Blood said. "It's probably some woman."

Mr. Drupe said: "Ah!" and then he added, "that's the devil! That's the very devil that all we agents have to contend with, that and thirst. If there's ever any woman connected with a candidate you can bet your hat

she'll make a burst out just four days before the polling. They never consider the mess it gets us into, and we've got wives and families dependent on us like other persons. I've got three children myself, but no one ever thinks of the political agent as a citizen and father. What am I to do ? "

Your feelings do you infinite credit, Mr. Drupe," Mr. Blood said, " but their expression at this moment interrupts my thoughts. Just tell me this: Was your principal seen talking to any woman particularly yesterday ? "

" He talked to a hundred and twenty," Mr. Drupe said grimly, " I saw to that. Wives of voters. And he shook hands with every one of them."

" But any woman particularly ? " Mr. Blood asked.

" No," the agent answered, " he behaved like the pink of propriety. He spoke at a meeting at Bolsover Cross Roads at seven. At twenty minutes past seven he visited every cottage in Bolsover. At a quarter past eight he motored back and addressed a mass meeting in the Market Hall. And then I saw him giving two women, a mother and a daughter, a lift home. And a very proper proceeding it was. I've told him that whenever he sees a mother and daughter on the road anywhere he's always to offer them a lift. It produces no end of good feeling in the constituency."

" What did they look like ? " Mr. Blood asked.

" Oh! cheaply dressed," Mr. Drupe answered ; " you needn't be alarmed. The mother might be a farm labourer's wife and the daughter an assistant in one of the large drapers' shops in the market place."

" It's my belief, then," Mr. Blood said, " that he's broken away. I've always expected that he'd break away. In fact, I felt it was coming when he stuck that

passage about a small shop into his speech yesterday afternoon. I hadn't sanctioned those words."

"And very foolish they were, too," Mr. Drupe said.

"No, they weren't," Mr. Blood answered. "Did you speak to any of the audience afterwards?"

"Only to about a dozen," Mr. Drupe said.

"And weren't they all small shopkeepers?" Mr. Blood asked; "and wasn't every one of them as pleased as Punch?"

"Well, I'm not saying that they weren't," Mr. Drupe answered.

"Then what more do you want?" Mr. Blood questioned.

"I don't know," Mr. Drupe answered dejectedly. "I only know it's unconventional. I don't like it. I don't like your candidate, and I don't like his ways. I don't believe he's got a future, and for two pins I'd resign."

"Now, look here, Drupe," Mr. Blood said. "If you'll take my advice you won't. I believe Mr. Fleight is going to have the longest career of any man you've ever handled. I believe it and I know it, and if my head isn't longer than yours I'll give you leave to boil it and eat it with parsley sauce."

"A lot of good that would do me," Mr. Drupe said. "The point is, are you going to find my candidate and bring him back?"

"I don't know," Mr. Blood answered. "I don't believe it matters. I'll ask Reginald."

Reginald was indeed at that moment coming back from the west door. He came in, exclaiming:

"I can give myself three-quarters of an hour, now!"

"The point is," Mr. Blood said to his brother, "ought we to find Mr. Drupe's candidate or ought we not? He

appears to have gone off with some woman. Of course, you understand that he will come back."

"I don't know," Mr. Reginald said; "what's the chap aiming at?"

"Oh, he wants a long career and a safe seat," Mr. Blood said. "He's a sticker."

"Then the position is pretty simple," Mr. Reginald answered. "It doesn't much matter whether he wins the first election or whether he loses it. In some ways it would be safer afterwards if he lost it. I'll tell you why. If he wins it he'll have to devote the greater part of his time to work in the House. But what's wanted to make a safe seat is work in the constituency—long work and hard work. So that if he wins this election there's always a chance that he might lose the next, whereas if he wins his second fight with the ground prepared, all he's got to do is to go on ladling money into the institutions and the football clubs and all the other beanfeasts and he may hold the seat for ever and ever. What's his chance of winning anyhow, supposing you have him on the ground all right?" Mr. Reginald asked of Mr. Drupe. "About even?"

"About even," Mr. Drupe answered.

"Let me see if I've got the position about right," Mr. Reginald remarked. "Byefleet for the last twenty years has been pretty safe for the Government. We're Opposition, aren't we? The Government party organisation in the constituency is weak, isn't it? That's to say, it's grown negligent because the seat has always been considered safe. On the other hand, the late Government member's friends are working all that they decently can against the present Government candidate. I understand they are disgusted because, after twenty years' faithful political service, the best job they've been able

to find for him is that of Consul in Jutland or Finland, or something of that sort. There aren't, I believe, any disturbing factors—I mean that neither the Government nor the Opposition has got any political programme that the constituency or any constituency in the world cares twopence about. It's just a straight party fight. Of course, the Government is slightly unpopular, because Governments always are. There are two auctioneers in Byefleet who are disgusted because they haven't been given jobs as official surveyors. They've always been strong supporters of the Government hitherto, now they're working as hard as they can against the party. On the other hand the two auctioneers who have got the jobs don't like 'em so much now they've got 'em, and, anyhow, they're too busy to do much for the party."

"How did you know that?" Mr. Drupe asked sharply.

"Oh, I just guessed it," Mr. Reginald answered. "It's the sort of thing that always happens. They call it the swing of the pendulum, but that's what it really is. Now, let's sum up the position. I'm an engineer and I see things pretty well always as a matter of strains—one strain opposing another, and so on. Let's see, then, what we've got. Put down one for the fact that Byefleet has always been a Government seat. That's one. Put against it—·33 per cent. for the fact that the party organisation is rotten, ·33 per cent. for the fact that the former member is secretly working against the present candidate, and ·33 per cent. for the swing of the pendulum. That gives you one against the Government. So we're all even and there's no bothering politics. Now we've got to consider the candidate. There's Mr. Gregory—the other fellow. He's a stick, isn't he? What have they put him up for? Just money? I thought so. He's cotton; our man's soap. There's

nothing to choose between those two commodities. Now what about our man's personality? It's good, isn't it?"

"I don't know," Mr. Drupe said. "Frankly I don't know. The rank and file like him because he's such an oddity. The leaders of the party here can't stand him because he's an atrocious little Jew. I'm blest if I know how to handle him. So, to tell the honest truth, I let him handle me. One of the great points about an election is the question of personalities. The other side has decided to go in for them thick and strong. They've got placards out showing Mr. Rothweil as a gentleman with a nose about two feet long stirring up a soap vat labelled 'Filthy Lucre,' and the inscription is 'Englishmen vote for Englishmen and not for Jew sweaters.' They've got another placard representing Mr. Rothweil with enormous drops of sweat pouring all off him. They're putting it about the constituency in private that Mr. Rothweil's father wasn't really his father but that he's illegitimate."

"Well, that's all right!" Mr. Blood said. "What about the personalities against the other chap?"

"That's just the vexing part of it," Mr. Drupe said, and he wiped his forehead with his dusty pocket handkerchief. "Mr. Rothweil absolutely won't let us use a single one. Yet we've got some pretty splendid things against Mr. Gregory. He keeps pigs in his drawing room!"

"Don't use them," Mr. Reginald said. "It's always a great pull not to have used personalities." He turned upon his elder brother. "Now I'll tell you what to do," he said. "You'd better go and find your man. The chances are ten to one that he's gone off with some woman, and it'll be just your job to tell from the feel of

things whether it's the sort of woman to make a nasty scandal between now and the next general election or whether it isn't. If it is, you'll have to yank Mr. Rothweil straight here and he'll get in with a majority of 130 or so. If it isn't—if it's quite a decent sort of woman—you'll let him stop with her and the other chap will get in with a majority of something between one and ten. Because I'll tell you a thing you haven't noticed, Mr. Drupe, a matter that this time I know from personal observation amongst our own tenants. Mr. Gregory wears gloves when he shakes hands with the voters. That's sufficient to dish him altogether. He has a new pair of gloves every day, and that's been noticed, too—particularly amongst the railway workers in West Byefleet and the Purbeck suburbs."

Mr. Drupe said, "By Jove! that's enough to dish anybody. And to think I never noticed it!"

A deep depression settled down upon Mr. Drupe. "I never thought," he said, "that I should come to be taught my trade."

"Oh, don't you mind being taught anything by Reginald!" Mr. Blood said. "He's a perfect devil! He could teach anybody anything." He stretched lazily and reluctantly. "I suppose," he said, "it means my having out that beastly sixty horse-power. Unless you think I could do it by train."

"You certainly can't," Mr. Reginald answered. "The best train you can get up to town now will take you four hours to do the thirty miles and then it'll only land you at Charing Cross, whereas you can be in Hampstead in an hour and a half if you go over by the Tilbury Ferry."

Mr. Blood looked at his brother with a sort of enquiring submissiveness.

"Hampstead?" he asked.

"Certainly, Hampstead!" Mr. Reginald answered, and Mr. Blood stood up with the air of a little boy who has been told what his job is.

"You'd better," Mr. Reginald said to Mr. Drupe, "go into the dining-room and get Lennards to give you some cider and a sandwich. I want to say one word to my brother."

And as Mr. Drupe's heavy boots echoed through the noontide silence of the great house, Mr. Reginald turned gloomily upon Mr. Blood.

"The wicked thing," he said, "that you've got up your sleeve, that you've been thinking of for the whole of this atrocious morning is that you mean to put me up as Government candidate against Mr. Rothweil at the next general election!"

"Oh, you perfect devil!" Mr. Blood said. "How did you guess that?" He didn't, however, wait for an answer because he knew perfectly well how his brother's powers of deduction worked, tranquilly and with certitude, to the exact end, and he added: "Of course, I shan't put you to the strain unless it's absolutely necessary. But you know what my views of you are, and you know I don't stick at anything. Besides, the Chancellor of the Exchequer desires it."

# PART II

# I

IT was about a quarter to two when Mr. Blood reached the shining façade of Palatial Hall, Hampstead. The famous and ornate mansion stood immensely high, its views embracing to the blue distances parts of the counties of Middlesex, Bucks, Herts and Oxfordshire. It was built from floor to roof of shining green and yellow tiles. The water-spouts were all of gilt lead and the windows, leaded eccentrically, were set with glasses of the brightest and richest colours and even in places with the matrices of precious stones. A long colonnade of marble pillars supporting a pitched roof of green tiles ran from the steep road up towards the front door. And this mansion had been the plaything of Mr. Aaron Rothweil, senior.

Mr. Blood climbed up the steep path of the colonnade and thundered on the door with sounds that reverberated into far distant courts. The manservant who opened the door Mr. Blood recognised as having been formerly in the service of his friend the Marquis of Abergeldie, and this relieved him of a dilemma. He was anxious to see the mistress of this mansion at as early an opportunity as might be possible.

"Dixon," he said, "you know who I am"—and he made no effort to conceal the fact that he was hurried and in earnest. "Just tell me if Mr. Rothweil or Mr. Fleight, whichever it is, is at home, and just tell me, if he isn't, where he is."

"Everybody knows you, Mr. Blood," the servant said.

" But I'm afraid we can't help you much. The address that I'm forwarding his letters to is under cover of Mr. A. Rothweil and care of yourself at Corbury."

"Yes, I know," Mr. Blood said with some exasperation "But the point is that he's disappeared."

" Then you'd better, sir," the servant said, " see her ladyship."

" Who the devil's her ladyship ? " Mr. Blood asked.

" Her ladyship would be Mrs. Fleight," the servant answered, " if it wasn't that she was the Baroness di Sonnino—a Portuguese title, as I understand, sir."

" Do you suppose she'd see me ? " Mr. Blood asked.

" I can't imagine," Dixon answered, " any reason whatever why her ladyship should refuse to see you."

" Then ask her," Mr. Blood retorted.

The butler's feet brushed, echoing, over the polished marble flooring. The whole of the large hall was of white marble inlaid with leaf decorations of ivory. The ceiling was supported by the famous twisted pillars of porphyry, and elevated upon the easel that stood upon the black skin of a bear, there was the famous Rembrandt. It faced exactly the front door and partly concealed the entrance into the next hall. It represented an old, yellow, and mournful Jew with a large black beard, who gazed pathetically at Mr. Blood. The butler returned and remarked: " Will you come this way, sir ? " and Mr. Blood followed him round the famous Rembrandt.

He found himself descending steps of white alabaster into a dining hall that was all white. The walls were of alabaster, too, carved with low reliefs representing the King Assur-Bani-Pal in his war chariot, discharging arrows from a bow at gazelles, lions and partridges.

The eight pillars that supported the roof of this apartment were also of alabaster, and round them, in low relief, there marched processions of maneless lions. There were no windows to this hall and the light fell from above. In the centre of it was the square basin of a fountain. Beside the fountain there was set a small table with shining napery at which there sat a fair creature devouring a lobster. She held a cracked claw between two delicate fingers. Her features were very pink and white. Her figure was very long and clothed in a very tight dress of broderie Anglaise with a tight collar that went up behind her ears, and she continued to nibble the pink flesh that came from the scarlet shell. Upon the white tablecloth in front of her there stood a green Venetian glass vase filled with sprays of pink godetias, a green bottle, a tall glass containing sparkling water and a lump of ice, a small bottle of Beaune, the dish which contained the remainder of the lobster and a plate with much of its scarlet shell. Mr. Blood came to the side of the table and the fair creature looked up at him with unemotional curiosity. She nibbled a little more of the lobster and then she remarked in an agreeable voice :

" You're the man that's taken my Fleight away from me."

" Wouldn't it be truer to say," Mr. Blood said, " that you're the woman that's just carried off my Rothweil ? "

" No, I certainly haven't," the Baroness answered with the slightest of cockney intonations.

" Well, then, he's disappeared," Mr. Blood said.

The Baroness said " Oh ! " with a jocular shade in her tone.

She rose from her chair and, with her stockinged feet, pulled from under the table the shoes that she had kicked off for greater ease. When she had got these on again

she walked clickingly towards the fourth pillar from the door on the right-hand side and remarked to the head of an alabaster lion: "Give me 1942 Central." She had laid one of her delicate fingers upon the tip of the lion's nose. Although she was some yards away from Mr. Blood he could hear her conversation quite distinctly.

"Is that Jenner and Jenner?" she asked. "I'm the Baroness di Sonnino. Where's Mr. Fleight?"

And Mr. Blood heard quite distinctly the answer in rather metallic tones. "I'm very sorry to say we lost sight of him yesterday at Byefleet and we haven't been able to pick up a trace of him again."

"Oh, you're always losing sight of him!" the Baroness said. "What's the good of you? Have you been to that tobacco stall?"

"He hasn't been near the tobacco stall to-day," the voice answered, "and we don't think it would be discreet to ask the young lady any questions."

"Then ring off," the Baroness said. She turned upon Mr. Blood. "Now you know as much about it as I do."

"Then I'd better be off," Mr. Blood said.

"Oh, no, I think you'd better not," the lady answered coolly. "I've got several things I want to say to you, and, as you've pushed your way in here, it's more or less your duty to hear what I've got to say."

"So it is," Mr. Blood answered, "but I've not much time; certainly no time for forms and ceremonies, and if you insist upon what can only be a business conference when I'm in a great hurry, I can only say that in all probability I shan't behave like a gentleman."

"Oh, I don't care a bit about that!" the Baroness said, "but I think you'll admit I've a right to my scene."

"You've a right to any number of scenes," Mr. Blood said, "but not with me. You've had about five with

our unfortunate Aaron since he announced his intention of taking seriously to a career. You can have a thousand more with him as far as I'm concerned. It's no part of my business to separate you——"

The lady uttered an entirely incredulous "Oh!"

"No, it certainly isn't," he continued; "so that all we've got to settle at this interview, which isn't going to be a scene—no, it certainly isn't going to be a scene, and I'll tell you why. If you start on at me about your blighted affections I should say something impolite and go away. And if you talked about—let's say, about betrayals and things—I should have to point out to you that as I happen to know something about pretty well everything, I happen to know Teddy Flanders rather more intimately than I know anyone else in the world. And when I took the trouble to get Teddy Flanders shaken out of an overdose of chloroform, Teddy Flanders told me a good deal of your past career. I don't say I'm going to tell our poor Aaron anything about those matters; in fact, I'm certainly not going to. But I should think what I've already told you ought to be sufficient to stop your even desiring to have a scene with me. Because you know I can make it so much more unpleasant for you than ever you could possibly for me. But, since I am here it'll probably be a satisfaction to us both if I put things on a sound business footing."

The Baroness di Sonnino gave a little sigh. Being essentially feminine, she was creditably disappointed that she was not to have her scene—her opportunity for a splendid dramatic display. But, on the other hand, it would certainly be agreeable and quieting to formalise the business matters which, in spite of quite respectable generosity on the part of Mr. Fleight, never had been settled. She therefore remarked friendlily:

"Well, you're a perfect old fiend, and you've certainly got me on the hip as far as my making any scene is concerned; but it stops at that. I mean that I'm as perfectly up to the business side of things as ever you can be. So you can tell me as quickly and as quietly as you like what it pans out at. And in the meantime, as you probably haven't had any lunch, take a lobster claw."

Mr. Blood said, "Thanks!" and he did so, for he was really quite hungry. And the lady poured him out a glass of Beaune, which he drank.

"What it pans out at," Mr. Blood said, "is this—you keep this house for life and Mr. Rothweil runs it for you. You get three thousand a year *dum casta, etcetera*—also for life, with remainder of the capital necessary for making up that sum to your heirs or to the survivor in case you take it into your head to marry. But you must keep perfectly respectable, because, since it isn't in the least part of my programme to make the excellent Aaron break with you, I can't have him mixed up with any sort of nasty scandal."

The lady took on the air of being about to become voluble. Mr. Blood said hastily:

"Good heavens! Don't imagine that I think you have the least desire or chance of being anything other than perfectly, witheringly respectable. I know that when our friend Aaron took you over from poor Teddy Flanders you became a clergyman's daughter, and for the rest of your life will behave as such. So that I only made that suggestion for your own enlightenment and to show you how perfectly desirable your own position will be in the world. You will be the wealthy Baroness di Sonnino, Mr. Aaron Rothweil's tenant of Palatial Hall, and also his intimate friend and confidante.

It will lead you anywhere if you want to make a career, or it will give you a perfectly lovely position in case you just want to sit still for the rest of your life."

The Baroness reflected for a minute. These terms appeared to her to be far more satisfactory than anything she could possibly have desired before this interview. For, since she had never been brought up to trust anybody, she had never been able to believe that Mr. Fleight might not at any moment turn her on the streets. Nevertheless she affected a rather cunning air and asked speculatively :

" But supposing I were to cut my throat on Aaron's doorstep on the day of his marriage to whomsoever it is that you've got up your sleeve—what would be the pecuniary damage that that would cause to his subsequent career ? "

" It's a little difficult to say," Mr. Blood said. " It might cost £150,000 to smooth out the traces."

" And £150,000 at 5 per cent.," the lady said ; " that would be £7,500 a year, wouldn't it ? "

" So it would," Mr. Blood replied ; " but it wouldn't be the least use to you. It wouldn't even be spent on you. It would be spent on newspaper reporters and the building of sanatoria in Mr. Rothweil's constituency and other means of obtaining popular esteem and respectability. Not a penny of it would come to your lacerated corpse."

" It wouldn't be a question of my lacerated corpse, you know," the lady said coolly. " The point is that the mere threat to do it has a capital value, according to your own estimate, of £150,000."

" Oh, no, it hasn't ! " Mr. Blood said calmly. " If you really and seriously threatened that to our poor Aaron it wouldn't have the effect of making him pay you money.

It would only have the effect of making him give up his political career and devote the whole of his poor time to you. You see he's such a decent, simple, God-fearing Jew, and in his polygamous Eastern heart he's so really attached to you, though—if you'll excuse my saying it —you bore each other to death—that he wouldn't ever realise that you were making the threat in order to get his money. He'd think it was because of your passion for him and he'd simply give up his career in order to salve your broken heart. In that case he wouldn't make any settlements on you. He just wouldn't think it was necessary, because he'd be going to devote his whole life to looking after you."

The lady said " Ah ! "

Mr. Blood continued after a pause which he knew was sufficient to let the truth of his views sink in :

" So you'd better take what I offer you. If you'll consider it you'll see that I've been awfully decent with you. What I've really done is to take into account that you had a threat against poor Aaron that was worth £150,000. So I'm giving you £7,500 a year—£4,500 for the rent and expenses of this house and £3,000 a year for pin-money. You can't complain that I've taken any advantage of my secret knowledge of you. On the contrary, I'm giving you a perfectly secure situation. I'm not depriving you of the society of Aaron, for whom I can quite believe you've a perfectly sincere affection. You'll get probably half of his time and be at liberty to work on his liberality as much as you like. He'll buy you more Portuguese titles if you want them and more pearl necklaces like the one you've got on. And you've got to see, in conclusion, that it will be really more agreeable to love a man who's becoming day by day more and more of a celebrity than to have to live with a little nobody of a

Jew who mopes about in this preposterous exhibition until he yawns his head off for mere boredom."

"That's all very true," the Baroness said; but then she suddenly clenched her fists. "But this other woman!" she exclaimed.

"What other woman?" Mr. Blood asked.

"This one—the one you've got up your sleeve," she said bitterly.

"Oh, she!" Mr. Blood said, and he gave her credit for a perfectly genuine pang of jealousy. "I thought you meant the girl at the tobacco stall. I'm afraid you'll have to put up with my candidate. And you'll have the gratification of knowing that she comes of a race that thinks itself absolutely defiled by marrying into our poor dear Aaron's race."

"I thought she was a dirty German!" the Baroness commented.

"She'll marry him," Mr. Blood said, "and she'll detest him—or at least she'll detest herself for marrying him. And she'll want to take up with other men, but she won't dare to for fear of losing her position. So that she'll have a pretty hellish time of it, and you, my dear, will have all the fun. And that's all there is about *that*."

"I suppose I shall have to give in," the lady said very slowly, "but it goes against the grain—the thought of that German pig. No, I don't think that I can stand it." But then by an oddity of psychology it suddenly came into her head to doubt his good faith, and immediately the settlement seemed to her to become overwhelmingly desirable.

"You aren't fooling me merely to keep me quiet?" she exclaimed, with a sudden and almost painful anxiety. "You'll really make those settlements? You won't throw me over at the last moment?"

"My good girl!" Mr. Blood said gently, "you know who I am. You must have heard of me from Teddy Flanders."

"Oh! I know all about that," the Baroness said. "I know you're a gentleman, but gentlemen can only be trusted to keep their word to other gentlemen. There's never a poor girl in the world that can afford to trust any one of you, and that's the devil's own truth. I can't afford to be thrown out; I've got these luxurious habits now. It's no good. I couldn't go back to a tea-shop or the beastly dressing rooms they give the back row at the Variety. Come, you give me a piece of paper signed with your own name."

Mr. Blood, after a moment's hesitation at the distastefulness of the task, for that he shouldn't be trusted seemed to him the most disagreeable episode of his career, took from his breast-pocket a small betting-book, and from his left-hand pocket a fountain pen. He wrote in the betting-book: "I promise to pay the Baroness di Sonnino, otherwise Elizabeth Brown, the sum of £150,000 in the event that Mr. Aaron Rothweil, of Palatial Hall, Hampstead, should not settle on her at the date of any marriage he may contract, a life income equal in value to £7,500 a year." He signed his name, tore the leaf out of his betting-book and handed it to the lady.

"You can do what you like with it," he said. "I don't know that it has any legal value, but it would be sufficient to get me kicked out of most of my clubs and warned off the turf in case I tried to go behind it."

The Baroness drew a deep breath of satisfaction. "I guess that's enough," she said.

"It's a deuced sight too much!" Mr. Blood answered. "Supposing I can't find Aaron, supposing the whole thing goes to pieces—what then?"

"Well, I'll do what I can to help you," the Baroness answered. "What do you want me to do?"

"The first thing I want you to do," Mr. Blood said, "is to take your confounded detectives off Aaron. They can't even keep on his track, and they only irritate him."

"I'll do that," the Baroness said with a sigh.

"And for anything else," Mr. Blood continued, "just go on as you've been going before. Nag at him and wrangle at him and sponge on him and worry him and keep him as lively as a puppy in a cage full of cats. That's all I ask."

"Well, I can do all that," the lady answered.

"And the girl at the tobacco stall?" Mr. Blood asked. "What's her name and where does she live?"

"Her name's Gilda Leroy," the Baroness said, "and she keeps a tobacco stall at High Street Station up-platform on the Underground. But as to where she lives I haven't the beginnings of a notion. The detectives never seem to have been able to find out, that proves what a designing beast the woman is."

"No, it doesn't," Mr. Blood answered; "it just proves what confoundedly inefficient fools your detectives are."

Just as Mr. Blood was getting out of his car to mount the doorstep of 122a, Burton Street, the Hon. Mr. Debenham, who lived at No. 63, happened to pass him. He nodded and then turned back.

"I say," he asked, "why was your candidate in the West Strand Post Office last night with two enormous black eyes?"

"Oh!" Mr. Blood said with a grain of nonchalance, "there was a little rumpus with the suffragettes and he ran up to town to get them painted."

Mr. Blood went upstairs to Mr. Mitchell's room.

## II

MR. FLEIGHT, with two enormous black eyes and three of his front teeth knocked out, was in the backyard of Mrs. Leroy's house. Under that lady's direction he was opening a crate of lemons with a claw hammer. He had got the lid off—he was in his shirt sleeves and was wearing a great apron of sackcloth—when Mrs. Leroy exclaimed to him.

"You know, young man, I think it's about time you declared your intentions."

Mr. Fleight sat down upon the opened crate so that he was actually sitting upon the lemons themselves and wiped his brow with the corner of his sackcloth apron. He had such an air of bewilderment that Mrs. Leroy herself began to laugh. She regarded the small, dejected figure, the hooked nose, the damaged features, the apron that came right up to the chest and the shirt sleeves rolled up so that the small, weedy arms showed a mass of bruises. And then she said:

"It do seem absurd to think that a flibberty-gibbet like you should be expected to have any intentions at all. But it's my duty to ask, and I do ask it."

That was on the Tuesday afternoon. On the night before, just after his speech in the Market Hall at Byefleet Mr. Fleight had come across the mother and daughter just as he was descending the steps of the Hall. They had indeed planted themselves directly in his way. Mrs. Leroy had expected him to exhibit signs of perturbation, but all that he had said was:

"Hullo! You've come down to hear me speak. I thought you would one of these days."

"Yes, we've found you out," Mrs. Leroy said.

He answered:

"Of course you would! You would naturally one of these days. Get into the car. I'll take you for a run. I must get some fresh air into my lungs."

Gilda Leroy perceived a chauffeur with a grave face, exactly resembling a naval cadet, standing holding open the door of an immense landaulette. It was almost the biggest car she had ever seen, and she understood that she was to make her way into the dark interior. She did so and sank down upon something soft—the softest cushioned seat she had ever imagined. Her mother followed her immediately and sat down at her side. Then Mr. Fleight put his head in at the door and asked whether they would have the car shut or open. The chauffeur was helping him into a rather heavy overcoat, and, having taken away the top hat which he wore for political purposes, had presented him with a German deerstalker hat of greenish felt.

"Oh, good heavens!" Mrs. Leroy exclaimed; "you keep the thing shut! With my asthma I never could abide the night air."

"Then I shall drive," Mr. Fleight said. "I must have the fresh air and I'm nervous and irritable. I want a good spin."

"But you be careful, young man," Mrs. Leroy said. "Our train goes at 9.30, and it's a quarter past eight now. We don't want to miss it."

Mr. Fleight said: "That'll be all right," and suddenly he turned on the lamp in the roof of the car. The light welled out, inconceivably brilliant to Gilda Leroy, though

in some strange way it was exactly what she had expected of life.

They were in a large, square space that appeared to her to be nearly as big, though not so high, as their parlour at home. It was all upholstered in a sort of mouse skin grey velvet that made the light seem twice as brilliant. It began to move with a gentle smoothness such as Miss Leroy had never experienced. There was some desultory cheering from a small crowd that had lingered on the steps of the Town Hall and to Gilda that, too, seemed appropriate, for she considered that her hero ought never to depart from anywhere save to the sound of cheering.

In front of her was a sort of ledge-table containing a great number of objects in silver—a clock whose hands were still, another shaking and vibrating, a great bottle of smelling-salts with a silver top, a silver cigar case, a match-box, an A B C Railway Guide in a silver case. And above the table, hung in a silver vase, was a great bouquet of flowers.

The town glided by them, the vibrating hands of the silver clock jumped to five, to ten ; the country outside them grew dark, they seemed to be going into a dusky cave lit up by the enormous headlights. The pale faces of men, looking round, shot by them ; their progress was attended by the musical notes of the siren, and against the glow cast by the headlights they could see the dark silhouettes of the hunting hat of Mr. Fleight and the cap of his chauffeur, motionless as the heads gazed forward. The vibrating hands of the dial jumped to thirty and trembled towards forty.

"Oh, mother!" Gilda exclaimed, "we're going at forty miles an hour. That's what it means."

"Well," Mrs. Leroy said, "his neck's as valuable to him as ours are to us, so I suppose it's all right."

Gilda said: "Oh, I'm not afraid! It's exactly like what I always expected it would be like. It's so exactly like it that I seem to have lived in it all my life."

"Well, my girl," Mrs. Leroy said grimly, "you didn't get that from your father or from me. Where's the young man going? We shall miss the train."

"Oh, don't interfere!" Gilda said. "Let's go on like this. It's like heaven!"

They illuminated old houses as they shot past; dim horses appeared looking white or dun-coloured and drawing carts that had the aspect of being covered in dust.

A long time afterwards, when they had begun already to pass street lamps, a monstrous object with the appearance of a tower of lighted glass loomed up against them. It was a double-decked tram.

"This is Lewisham," said Mrs. Leroy. "He will be making for the Elephant and Castle and then along to Kennington. He's taking us home. Well, I'll admit that is doing the thing in style."

It was exactly what Gilda Leroy had expected, and yet it was odd to note the details of it—the swinging along in a square of lighted privacy through the familiar streets that the brilliance of their interior rendered dim, and peopled with distant humanity seeming so far away and unreal that the people on the pavements might have been dim fishes in a dim aquarium. Gilda Leroy seemed to feel herself different and apart; a sort of a priestess, a sort of a queen. She perceived that the policeman who was holding up the traffic let them pass in Parliament Square, and it seemed to her that the splendour of life could go no further.

"So that's what it is," she whispered to herself. "No one can say now that I haven't lived."

The car slowed down to turn out of Victoria Street.

At the top of Augusta Street it stopped altogether. There was no getting up that thoroughfare by reason of the costermonger stalls that, in two lines, blocked it up. Mr. Fleight got slowly down from his seat and opened the door for them.

"You'll have to get down now," he said, "and walk the rest of the way. I'll see you safe home."

He told the chauffeur to go to a garage by Victoria Station and wait till he was telephoned to.

And then Gilda Leroy found herself walking over the bits of wrapping paper, of sawdust, and over the rotten grapes of Augusta Street once more. The costermongers were shouting their endless invitations to purchase. The street children ran against her legs; Mr. Fleight, in his long mackintosh and his German hunting hat, walked ahead with her mother; and outside the public-houses there stood the same women holding the same babies for their neighbours who were inside drinking.

A knot of ill-grown lads and young men obstructed the entrance to Augusta Mews, and they had some difficulty in pushing their way through. Gilda Leroy could hear them address abusive remarks to Mr. Fleight, and it seemed to her like a profanation.

They found her father sitting behind the counter in the shop.

"You've been having a high old beano," he said good-naturedly. "Mrs. Kerridge said she couldn't wait after half-past six, and I've been sitting here ever since. Sold a dozen kippers; that's what I've done."

"Oh, pa!" Miss Leroy exclaimed breathlessly. "We've come home in a motor car. In Mr. Fleight's motor car. He's standing up for a member of Parliament."

Mr. Leroy looked rather queerly at Mr. Fleight.

" Well, I suppose he knows his own business best," he said. " If he does his duty in Parliament he may be of some use, for I've taught him a thing or two and I suppose that's why he's come here—' learning the conditions of the life of the poor ' they call it."

" Oh, I come here because I like to come here," Mr. Fleight said. " I look on you as friends, and I haven't got many others."

" Well, they always say the rich have no friends," Mrs. Leroy said. " I don't blame you. You've always been welcome. But I suppose you won't be coming again ? "

" I don't know whether I can," Mr. Fleight answered. " It's a question of time. I don't know whether I shall get the chance. When I can come, or if I can come, I certainly shall. But I must get back to Byefleet now. So it's good-bye till we meet again."

He shook hands all round, opened the door of the shop and let himself out. There was a momentary silence, during which they could hear voices from outside. Then Mr. Leroy said :

" Well, he hasn't offered to make me doorkeeper of the House of Lords or given you a new bonnet, old woman."

" Why should he ? " Mrs. Leroy asked rather sharply. " We've never given him anything."

" But it's what you'd expect," Mr. Leroy said. " He's had his supper here many a time and I've given him many valuable tips. They're always talking in Parliament about the ' conditions of life of the poor ' and the Housing Question, when all we want is to be let alone."

Gilda Leroy was exclaiming :

" Oh, shan't I ever see him again ? I'm sure my

heart's broken. What shall I do if I never ride in that motor car any more and never hear that gurgly voice of his or see those long moustaches? I couldn't stand it! I couldn't stand it! And I shan't ever!"

The voices outside had grown to a loud sound, and at the top of a violent crescendo the glass panels of the door crashed inwards; the lock gave, and a figure was hurled violently into the shop. It pitched on to its shoulder on the floor in front of the counter, scrambled to its feet and stood leaning back. It was Mr. Fleight. The blood was flowing from his nose and mouth, and in his eyes there was an expression of terror and submission such as distinguishes his race on occasions when Christians in large numbers beset, after their own fashion, solitary individuals.

## III

THE youth of Henry Street, James Street, and Charles and Augusta Mews had for a long time resented the visits of an insignificant-looking Hebrew to their neighbourhood. Their neighbourhood appeared to be to them a sort of fortress from which they must exclude the youthful males of Pimlico, King's Road, Chelsea, the Seven Dials, or even the East End. Their high stomachs and their sense of honour called for this assertion of the spirit of place. Therefore in the appropriate darkness outside Mrs. Leroy's shop they had set upon Mr. Fleight to the number of eighteen.

They had given him no particular explanation. They just hit him while they shouted. They struck him in the face with their fists ; they hit him on the top of the head, such of them as happened to be in the army, with their belts. They kicked his shins and his back, and they did their best to kick his stomach. But the crowd of them was too great round him to let this effective manœuvre come off. He said nothing and he did nothing. He crushed his head in between his shoulders and tried to bolt this way and that. He made no attempt at defence, which is the wise nature of his race where defence is hopeless. And when finally they threw him through the door of the Leroy's shop they felt that the honour of their community had been avenged. They had informed him, while they hit him, all shouting at once, though in different phrases, that he was a flash Jew from the Dials ; that they

wouldn't have him sparking their gals ; that a blooming blank bloke like him hadn't no call to walk their pavements, and they shouted through the shop door that if ever the blighter came to those parts again they would do him in good and strong. There was nothing personal about that cleansing of their neighbourhood ; they none of them had any admiration for Miss Leroy, who appeared to them a mean-spirited sort of young female. They had, in short, just done their manly duties, acting like lynchers of the United States, the fomenters of pogroms in Russia, or like the Wehmgericht of mediæval Germany, which acted in the dark when the public authorities did not perform their functions. And they knew that they had as worthily upheld the traditions of their neighbourhood as could have been done by Spitalfields, Bethnal Green, Islington, or the vicinity of the Caledonian Market. It was an act of justice of which they boasted for many weeks afterwards in that neighbourhood.

Leaning back against the counter Mr. Fleight spat out two of the teeth that he had not swallowed and remarked to Mrs. Leroy with a rather hissing intonation :

"There, you've tasted the blessings of our civilisation from the highest to the lowest on the same day! You've witnessed a democratic assemblage ; the pursuits of the idle rich and the real native pleasures of the Anglo-Saxon populace."

Mrs. Leroy went into the kitchen and ran quickly out with a rolling-pin.

"Put some vinegar and brown paper on his eye!" she exclaimed and went into the court. She approached the remainder of the band of young men, brandishing her rolling-pin, but without wasting her breath on

expressing her opinions. Gilda Leroy ran into the scullery to fill a basin with water, and the master of the house, arising, put his hands deep into his pockets and, filling the doorway with his large person, surveyed the proceedings of his wife in the court. She caught one weedy boy a good crack on the side of the jaw as he started to run. But the others, having dispersed to safe distances, since she was not a very active woman, informed her earnestly from the other side of the main street that they would do her in upon an early opportunity, and they accompanied her progress along the thoroughfare with yells and cat-calls, until, a policeman appearing meditatively at the end of the street, they dispersed in silence. Mrs. Leroy went round the corner to a meat stall, where she purchased on credit, after some discussion, a pound and a half of beef-steak. The untoward event exercised the strongest possible influence upon the career of Mr. Fleight. This arose from his immense personal vanity. For, to an absolute and unassuming modesty as to his intellect, his powers, or as to the position that he deserved in society, Mr. Fleight added a personal vanity that was nothing more nor less than morbid. This was a trait that was very little suspected in him, since most people regarded him as being so plain that they never referred to his personal appearance for fear of causing him pain.

But when he looked in the glass Mr. Fleight was accustomed to see what he regarded as the ideal, typical man of the Western Hemisphere. He saw features of extreme regularity, a chin not too broad for intelligence, a slightly olive skin that showed, subcutaneously, the healthy tint of good red blood. His dark moustache was very carefully ordered; his dark hair was very carefully parted and waved slightly

over a broad, low forehead. And his eyes, which he regarded as his best features, were large, brown, mournful and introspective.

Thus he was now in a condition that made him feel he couldn't let anybody in the world see him. The Leroys had done so, but he experienced what was really an added passion to exhibit himself to no one else—to absolutely no one else. For, even after the Samaritan ministrations of Mrs. Leroy and her daughter, acting under the direction of Mr. Leroy, who had himself done a bit of fighting in his day, the state of Mr. Fleight's face was such that the mere thought of it made him shudder. No dishonour could have been more than that and no tragedy greater.

Having resisted very little, he had suffered hardly at all in his nerves, and the shock which a more combative animal would have experienced had been spared him altogether, so that he remained perfectly coherent and neither shivered nor whimpered whilst painfully they sponged his cut face, his swollen lips and his lacerated gums. The result when he came to look in the small, square looking-glass that was presented to him by Miss Leroy was absolutely unendurable. The flesh round his eyes was so puffed up that he could hardly at all perceive the brown pupil. It was beginning to grow a dull purple. Off the bridge of his nose the skin had entirely peeled, and when he drew up his lips in a feigned smile there was a gap in his upper jaw like that of a child who is losing its first teeth. And his first remark, immediately after having seen himself, was :

" I shan't possibly be able to make any more speeches at Byefleet."

" Why not ? " Mrs. Leroy asked. " I suppose you could get those black eyes painted."

" Not he, mother," Mr. Leroy said. " He won't look fit to be seen for a good fortnight; but," he added, in his capacity of a man who read the papers, " he could say he'd been bashed about by bruisers hired by the man that's against him, and that would be worth a few votes to him."

" No, it can't be done," Mr. Fleight said peremptorily. Along with his morbid vanity went a morbid fear that it should be known he considered himself handsome. And he stuttered and stammered slightly before he could think of any reason. " I should have to give information to the police. There'd have to be enquiries and things."

" Well, it would look a little awkward if it was found out that you'd been here," Mr. Leroy said.

" I don't mean that at all," the candidate for Byefleet answered rather haughtily. " I suppose I'm at liberty to go where I like. But I shouldn't be able to help my candidature by pretending that it was hired bruisers that had done it. So the more secret I can keep it the better it's going to be for me." He added, rather wilily, "But I don't see how I'm going to keep it secret."

This touched at once the hospitable chord in Mr. Leroy's heart.

" You can have a bed here for the night, I suppose."

" I don't see how he can," Mrs. Leroy exclaimed sharply. " It isn't as if this was an hotel. I've only got the two bedrooms."

" Well," Mr. Leroy said, " he can sleep in Gilda's room and Gilda can go to Mrs. Kerridge's like she does when her uncle George comes up for the Cup Tie."

" Oh, yes ! " Mr. Fleight exclaimed, eagerly, " that's exactly what I want done—you'll oblige me immensely by making an arrangement like that. In that way we can keep it absolutely dark."

"As dark as your eyes will be to-morrow," Mr. Leroy said jocularly.

"I don't see," Mrs. Leroy said sturdily, "why the young man can't go to his own house and keep it dark there."

"Because," Mr. Fleight answered eagerly, "the house will be chock full of reporters to-morrow morning and I can't trust my servants. You can't trust any Englishman or Englishwoman."

"You seem to be able to trust us, young man," Mrs. Leroy said.

"Oh, you're different!" Mr. Fleight answered. "I'd certainly trust you, but you're not the sort of people I move among. You're not representatives of English Society or their servants."

"I'm sure," Mrs. Leroy said indignantly, "when I was cook in Sir Pompey Munro's service you could have trusted me with your life and untold gold as well."

"I don't deny it," Mr. Fleight said; "but," he added cunningly, "could you have trusted any of the housemaids or the other women servants?"

"No," Mrs. Leroy conceded; "they was most of them hussies."

"Then that really settles it," Mr. Fleight said triumphantly, "for things aren't even what they were. And if you couldn't trust the household of a fine old family like Sir Pompey's, how are the servants of a Jew millionaire like me to be trusted? It's notorious that we Jews get the most insolent and untrustworthy servants in London, and yet we treat them better than anyone else in the world. And, I don't like much to speak about it, but I'll pay anything you like for the accommodation. Anything in reason or out of reason."

Miss Leroy, who had been trembling with excitement

during all this conversation, broke in now—and she was suffering from extreme emotion :

" Oh, ma, how can you think of haggling with him like this ? Hasn't he, as you might say, shed his precious blood for us ? Oughtn't we to allow him to wipe his feet on our sheets and counterpanes if he was so disposed ? Isn't it all along of us that this disaster has fallen on him ? "

" Now, I don't see why you should say that," Mr. Fleight said amiably, though his voice whistled still in the vacant gap in his teeth.

" Why ? " Miss Leroy exclaimed, and her excitement overcame her bashfulness. " It was because those hooligans thought you were keeping company with—coming after me."

Mr. Fleight began to smile, but he checked the impulse when he remembered the gap in his jaw.

" That's very ridiculous ! " he said; " though it does lend some reason to the fellows if they made that mistake. I thought myself it was just Anglo-Saxon lightness of heart and the opportunity of bashing somebody when they were eighteen to one."

" If you want to stop here, young man, until your black eyes are cured," Mrs. Leroy said, " you'll have to pay what Gilda's Uncle George pays—ten shillings a week for board and lodging and find your own washing—or eight and sixpence if you help me with the packing cases and things I have to tip the carters for. And I'd much rather it was the eight and six, for I can't abide having a lazy man sitting about and smoking in all the rooms all day long."

Mr. Fleight was about to say that he was ready to come in on the eight and sixpenny basis, since a certain amount of exercise would be necessary for him during

his seclusion, when Miss Leroy took the opportunity to go into a fit of perfectly real hysterics. She had to be taken over to Mrs. Kerridge's by her mother and put to bed ; and this seriously incommoded Mr. Fleight. Indeed, his next couple of hours or so were exceedingly agitated and presented to him the aspect of a series of dexterous but troublesome conjuring tricks. He wanted to send messages by the telegraph and the telephone, and he had intended to employ upon this work Gilda Leroy, who was young, intelligent and fairly acquainted with modern habits. Mr. Leroy was an absolute antique. He had never sent a telegram in his life, and though he had several times tried to use the telephone at the waterworks, that instrument had so exceedingly bewildered him that he swore he would never again dare to go near one of the things. Nevertheless, with Mr. Leroy as his henchman, Mr. Fleight set out.

He sent Mr. Leroy for a taxi-cab, which—the costermongers and their stalls having gone home for the night—was brought up to the very door of the shop, though the cabman grumbled exceedingly at the narrowness of the entrance. In the meantime he wrote a letter to his dentist, the great Mr. R. P. Wetherell, of New York. Then, with his hat crushed down over his eyes, Mr. Rothweil crept into the cab accompanied by Mr. Leroy. The cab very much upset the nerves of the turncock, who had never been in one of these vehicles before, and who dreaded an instantaneous and calamitous death.

Mr. Fleight covered his face with his handkerchief whilst he was walking across the West Strand Post Office, and he hid himself as far as he could in one of the compartments for writing telegrams, whilst

the telegram itself, along with the money to pay for it, he handed over his shoulder to Mr. Leroy. The turncock, however, was trembling so remarkably in the fingers that he was unable to affix the postage stamps, and this caused the clerks some annoyance. They said that two men in advanced stages of intoxication had no right to hinder the work of the Public Services. Mr. Fleight made a quick jump to one of the telephone boxes; it was, however, occupied by Mr. Debenham, by misfortune, and although Mr. Fleight covered his face as quickly as possible with his handkerchief, he was afraid Mr. Debenham must almost certainly have observed the state of his features. He entered the next telephone box in spite of the objections by the clerk at the counter that he had not given his number and he had not paid for his call in advance. From the interior of the box Mr. Fleight gave Mr. Leroy more money and the number of the garage at which his chauffeur had put up. Mr. Leroy dropped the money all over the Post Office and forgot the number, which Mr. Fleight had to look up all over again. These proceedings irritated the clerk at the counter still more; he came through into the part of the office that was designed for the public, approached the telephone box, and addressed the back of Mr. Fleight:

"Look here," he exclaimed, "you've no right to come here drunk! If you don't go away I shall call the police."

"I'm not drunk," Mr. Fleight muttered. "You give me 12077 Victoria."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," the clerk said sulkily. "Out you go!"

Mr. Fleight looked passionately round over his shoulder, and the effect upon the clerk was appalling,

since it showed what a terrible state his face must be in. The clerk jumped fully three feet backwards and exclaimed :

" Look here, if you're suffering from a mortal disease you've no right to use the telephone box ! It's forbidden by the Act."

" You damned ass ! " Mr. Fleight said with a bitter fury ; " what do you think I've got ? Cancer ? Leprosy ? This is the efficiency of the confounded British Public Service ! In any Christian country you'd expect they'd try to help a man who'd been smashed up in an accident to get on to his doctor, instead of letting any jackanapes put all the possible hindrances he could think of in a man's way. I might be bleeding to death internally whilst you're playing the fool here."

" Oh, come now ! " the clerk said in an aggrieved and shocked voice, " why didn't you say what was the matter at the start ? I'll do all I can to help you. Perhaps you'd like a glass of water."

" I don't want anything," Mr Fleight said, " but for you to give me the number I want, and to get this letter through to Mr. Wetherell, the dentist, as quickly as you possibly can by express. It's no good your telling me that it would be quicker to telephone to him because it wouldn't. He's at his private house, where he isn't on the telephone."

" He shall have it in twenty minutes, Mr. Toms," the clerk said.

" Mr. who ? " Mr. Fleight asked.

" Do you suppose," the clerk answered, " that I don't know you for Cannoneer Toms, the champion bantam weight of the world, just come from fighting Charlie Thompson of Chicago ? Why, you're the best known man in the United Kingdom to anyone

that's any feeling for sport at all. You think I'm only a Post Office clerk, but I've got a soul above my station like the rest of the world."

Mr. Fleight had an odd sensation, as if he were going that night into a rest cure or into prison for a fortnight. He was afraid of anybody's seeing his face. But this Post Office clerk having seen it, the plunge seemed to be over as far as the clerk was concerned, and Mr. Fleight remarked :

" I haven't the least objection to listening to your disquisition upon yourself if you'll get that letter sent off first, and put me on to the number that I've asked you to give me three times."

" I'll get the letter to its destination in under a quarter of an hour," the clerk said zealously. He disappeared, and immediately afterwards, from the ear piece of the telephone, Mr. Fleight heard the vague metallic noises indicating that he was being put into communication with the garage where his car was waiting. The garage informed him that his chauffeur was getting a bit of supper.

" Well, tell him to come to me," Mr. Fleight said. " I'll hold the line till he does."

The garage appeared slightly to demur at this proposal. It seemed to them almost a sacrilege, and certainly an impertinence, to interrupt a chauffeur at his meal. And Mr. Fleight's chauffeur was very eminent in his profession. Mr. Fleight never quite rightly understood why his chauffeur was so eminent. But probably it was only because, being Mr. Fleight's chauffeur, he had such enormous sums at his disposal for tyres, petrol and sundries, that there was no member of the trade that was not ready to bow into the dust before him, and no other chauffeur who was not ready,

enviously, to treat him as a prince. The voice from the garage remarked anxiously:

"Oh, but he's at his *supper*. Supper, you know."

"But, hang it all!" Mr. Fleight exclaimed, "I'm his employer."

The voice did not seem to be in any particular way impressed. It remarked with a sort of reluctance:

"Oh, of course, if you're his employer . . ."

It ceased, apparently in order to consult someone, and then announced:

"If you really think it's necessary we'll send a boy to his restaurant."

"It's absolutely quite necessary," Mr. Fleight remarked, with a cynicism that, probably, did not travel along the wires. "I know, of course, that he won't like to be disturbed, but I'll apologise properly when he does come."

"Then I suppose," the voice said, still rather reluctantly, "it will be all right. Hold the line."

With the ear piece to his ear, Mr. Fleight turned once more to face the Post Office clerk, who at once burst into a flood of talk.

Of course, when Mr. Fleight first came into the office he had thought he and his trainer were two ordinary "drunks." But now he knew who they were he was ready—as long as it was becoming—to do anything to oblige him. And let him tell Mr. Toms that if he were the Prime Minister himself, and he came into there—as he did quite frequently when he was going to take a train from Charing Cross—he wouldn't put himself out one jot to do more than was demanded of his official position. Not one jot. "But when it's a question of *you* . . ." the clerk concluded.

"Well, I'm sure it's extremely obliging of you?" Mr. Fleight said.

"Not a bit," the clerk answered. It was just an act of acknowledgment of genuine merit.

"Now, where did you get all these opinions?" Mr. Fleight asked.

"Where do I get them?" the clerk exclaimed, as if any fool ought to have known. "Why, out of the newspapers, out of John Richard Green's 'Short History of England'; out of Maine's 'Spirit of Constitutional Law.'" And let him ask Mr. Toms what did he suppose it was the business of all the education they had to have to pass their examinations for the Post Office, if it wasn't for them to hold views and opinions, and know how to express them. And what was the object of it all? Look at Mr. Toms. If Mr. Toms would excuse his saying so—a few decades ago he would have been an ignoble, degraded, vicious creature. A common prize-fighter without an h. to his head. . . ."

Mr. Fleight was distracted by a voice exclaiming "Hullo!" on the telephone. But that came to nothing, and he asked desultorily of the clerk: "Then what do you propose as a remedy?" In a dim way he was interested in the clerk as he was interested in the people at the garage. He had never had quite such a conversation and, faintly, he had the feeling, that grew much more strong afterwards, that he was speaking, not to one or two, but to millions—that, in fact, he was interviewing triumphant Democracy.

"Remedy?" the clerk exclaimed. "I don't know that I want a remedy: it's what I want to see: it's civilisation. It's the high degree of efficiency we've arrived at." And all around us there was life and movement going on. That was what Parliament ought

to recognise. There was change. Our intellects were working all the time. We weren't static. Every day we perceive new aspects. Why, look at the Reverend Pennyfather Blowater, the democratic vicar. What would have been his attitude towards prize-fighting ten years ago? The Clerk didn't mind telling Mr. Toms he was talking to him about it the other day and Mr. Blowater said to him, "Jumnor, what is the whole country interested in? What takes the mind of everybody—all the world over? What has fascinated the attention of Maeterlinck, the great poet? Or supposing that you wanted to start a paper that you wanted to make money by, what would it have to be about? Boxing!" "Now," said the Reverend Blowater, "it's no good shutting our eyes to things that are a great public manifestation. This is one of the aspirations of the democracy, and the aspirations of the democracy are always right. The trouble of the age is that it's too much of a machine age; it's too grey, too unromantic. Now what do we see in a professional prize-fighter? Heroism, romance, the democracy asserting itself. What is needed for the career of such a man? Sobriety, temperance, determination, physical fitness, dash—all democratic virtues. Consider the career of such a man."

"Consider your own career," the clerk dropped his quotation of the Reverend Blowater and addressed Mr. Fleight. "Consider your own career. At eighteen, you beat Pony Matheson in Islington; next year you knocked out Bob Chapman in three rounds at Aberystwith; then you beat Cob Bradshaw in Melbourne; then you laid out G. L. Levin at Chicago, and now you've finished it all by polishing off Tony Morris in the Agricultural Hall this evening. And what I should like to say to our representatives in Parliament is this. . . ."

The post office clerk paused to draw a deep breath before commencing his peroration, but the voice of Chapman, the chauffeur, drew Mr. Fleight's attention to the telephone, and, whilst Mr. Fleight was telling the chauffeur to fetch some clothes in a bag and leave them at Victoria cloak-room so that Mr. Fleight could send for them in the morning, he was vaguely aware that a superior was upbraiding Mr. Jumnor, the clerk, for wasting time that should have been spent in filling up forms called "A."

Thus the voice of triumphant Democracy died away, and, holding his handkerchief to his face, Mr. Fleight seized the opportunity of bolting into the taxi-cab. Mr. Leroy bundled sheepishly in after him when he had directed the cabman to take them back to Augusta Mews.

"Now, what was all that talk about?" Mr. Leroy asked.

"Oh," Mr. Fleight answered, "that's only a symptom of the times. That's the young generation knocking at the door, that is."

"More like falling out of the window," Mr. Leroy said. "You'd have thought he'd had a bad shaking. Do you suppose there are many more like him?"

"Oh, we're breeding them by the million," Mr. Fleight answered. "I wonder whether that dentist will have arrived."

## IV

WHEN the dentist did, however, arrive, towards a quarter to twelve, he announced that Mr. Fleight's gums were still too swollen for him to do anything for them. Mr. Fleight had imagined that by the expenditure of a thousand pounds, or twenty thousand pounds, or anything, he could be provided with three new false teeth by breakfast time the next morning. But the dentist told him it just couldn't be done. There would have to be all sorts of bridges to make, teeth to be filed down, at least a day's work. And Mr. Wetherell had his other patients to consider. Humanity, he said, came before mere money. He promised, however, to come round next morning about half-past eight to make his measurements in case the swelling should have gone down. And, at the urgent entreaty of Mr. Fleight, he consented to get his dental manufacturers to send a complete set of appliances including an electrical storage battery to the Leroy's house so that he could work on the spot. This was going to cost something like £197. Mr. Wetherell said it seemed like lunacy, but that after all Mr. Fleight's money was his own. There was thus an end to romance for that day, and Mr. Fleight got to bed about half-past twelve in a sloping garret beneath the roof.

The way in which money works or does not work in a city like London is, as Mr. Fleight said next morning, amazing. There are times when—say at night—if you had a thousand pounds in your hand you could not possibly buy for yourself a lemon squash. But there are

other times—such as on this Tuesday morning—when things turn up as smartly and as mysteriously as the extra twopences present themselves to your notice in a taxi-cab.

Thus, at about a quarter past eight, Mrs. Leroy was annoyed and perturbed by the arrival of an immense red plush armchair, with head rests and leg rests, and arm rests and other and singular complications. Mrs. Leroy tried to bar the entrance of the four men who were carrying this grotesque monstrosity, but, at the urgent instance of Mr. Fleight, it was carried straight through the house and to the back yard, for, as the day promised to be fine, Mr. Fleight expressed his perfect willingness to be operated upon in the open air. Having brought in the chair, the workmen retired, and returned with a quantity of metal objects, long tubes and large metal cases containing storage batteries. These they proceeded to set up beside the monstrous and grotesque red chair in the back yard, which was already amply occupied by packing cases, loose straw, and the washing, which was hanging out to dry. Mrs. Leroy took this down before the arrival of the dentist. The dentist himself came at a quarter to nine, just as Miss Leroy was leaving for business, though, in consideration of the importance of these proceedings, she was determined to ask the travelling inspector who would visit her stall in the course of the morning to let her have a substitute at least during the late afternoon.

The dentist himself went through these operations with an admirable gravity. The position was extraordinarily odd, but, having once begun it upon that basis, he just continued. He was the most eminent dentist of the day and thoroughly accustomed to the mad, the suspicious, or the merely imbecile proceedings

of very wealthy people with too much time upon their hands. As for the inconvenience of the packing cases, and the generally undecorative nature of the landscape, he was prepared to take that out in his bill. And he grasped Mr. Fleight's head in his hands and subjected him to the usual professional assaults, whilst the pleasant sound of the drill buzzing its way through diminishing teeth, and the sharp sparking from the accumulator, caused in the mind of Mrs. Leroy, who held a basin of water upon the doorstep, a simple amazement and a great deal of gratification. She always had wanted to know how these here American dentists did their work, and what it was they charged you for. The dentist went away after he had had the electric appliances put in the scullery. He announced that he would send a large tarpaulin with which to cover the chair itself.

Mrs. Leroy calmly hung out her washing again, so that for the rest of the day they had to walk between airless avenues of damp white clothes, and it was beneath these that Mr. Fleight engaged himself, after lunch, in opening the crates of lemons with a crowbar. And, no sooner had he prized off the first lid than, assured that she had now got out of him the small piece of work that wanted doing, Mrs. Leroy felt impelled to ask the amazing question as to what were his intentions.

"It's a singular thing," Mr. Fleight said, "that you should ask me that question just now, because I have been questioning myself very seriously all this morning as to what my intentions really were."

"Well, that's a good thing, at any rate," Mrs. Leroy commented.

"The point is, Mr. Fleight continued, "that it is my intention to be absolutely and entirely loyal to

Mr. Blood. What Mr. Blood intends me to do I shall do, whatever happens."

"Then it would be a comfort," Mrs. Leroy exclaimed, "to know who Mr. Blood may be. It sounds as if he was a captain in the Salvation Army."

"He's certainly not that," Mr. Fleight said. "But the point is that he *is* the director of my career. I mean that I'm quite as much in his hands as I should be if he were a Salvation Army captain and I were a criminal desirious of reforming."

"Well, I do hope you aren't," Mrs. Leroy said; "I hope all your money has come to you by fair means."

"Oh, that's nothing to do with the case," Mr. Fleight said; "if you'll excuse my saying so, that's just drawing a red herring across the trail. The real point is that, although Mr. Blood has hitherto talked a great deal about how to direct my political career, he hasn't said anything about what my political ideals are to be. It's perfectly true that I'm Opposition candidate, but I don't in the least know whether in the long run I'm to be a Tory or a Socialist, or a Liberal Individualist for the matter of that. I may possibly be allowed to settle that for myself. And, if I am, the conversations that I had last night with the Post Office clerk, the people at the garage, and even your husband, and—if you can call it a conversation—with the hooligans who assaulted me—all these conversations and incidents have thrown so many side lights upon the state of civilisation, that it really has become extremely difficult for me to decide what my intentions are, or whether it's even possible to have any intentions at all."

"I don't see what all these people," Mrs. Leroy said, "have got to do with Gilda. I should have thought

it was the sort of thing that you and she would have been able to decide between you."

"Gilda?" Mr. Fleight exclaimed, with the aspect of a rather puzzled man. "Oh, you mean Miss Leroy. I daresay she's seen a great deal of life . . . ."

"How dare you say such a thing?" Mrs. Leroy exclaimed. "Gilda is as respectable—she's kept herself as straight as—as your own mother." She was silent for a moment, and then she began again. "Life indeed! If I thought you really knew what you were saying, for two pins I'd throw you out into the street, apron and all."

"But really, you know," Mr. Fleight answered, "I don't in the least understand what you mean. What does life mean to you?"

"These here champagne suppers," Mrs. Leroy said, "and the promenades at the music halls, and it ends on the streets. What can 'seeing life' mean but that? English is English, I suppose? And if you make a silk purse out of a sow's ear that's how it ends."

"It's a little difficult," Mr. Fleight began timidly, "to make you understand what I do mean. What I'm trying to say is that Miss Leroy appears to me from the little I've seen of her to be a person of a great deal of common-sense, and it may well be that she is acquainted with the conditions of life among the poor, let us say."

"The poor?" Mrs. Leroy exclaimed angrily. "Let me tell you, young man, that my daughter Gilda has no more mixed with people below her than you have. And not so much, if you come to consider your present situation. I don't know what on earth you may be trying to talk about, but you certainly don't mean to give offence."

"I don't really know, you know," Mr. Fleight said,

with an air of such gentle modesty as entirely to disarm the elderly woman, " what on earth you may be trying to talk about."

" He might be a poor babe of three," Mrs. Leroy remarked to a large sheet that hung at her side. They were indeed entirely boxed in by sheets in the square white cell, for Mrs. Leroy, whilst she was about it, did the washing for Mrs. Kerridge, who was very much occupied during the day. The opened packing case, upon whose lemons Mr. Fleight sat, occupied the very centre of the parallelogram. Mrs. Leroy had her back to the sheet which hung immediately in front of her own back door. " Now, I ask you," she apostrophised Mr. Fleight, " if you don't know that I'm referring to your goings-on with my daughter Gilda, what in the world do you know and ought you to be at large ? "

Mr. Fleight ejaculated :

" My goings-on with your daughter Gilda——"

" You're walking out with her," her incomprehensible reply came to him.

" But I'm not ! " he exclaimed. " She isn't here. I'm sitting on a packing-case."

" Now do you, or do you not," Mrs. Leroy said determinedly, " understand English ? "

" I begin to think I don't," Mr. Fleight said almost hopelessly. " But it certainly seems to me that I can't be walking out when I'm so obviously sitting here."

" Then," Mrs. Leroy said, " if you will force me to be indelicate—when I say ' walking out,' I mean do you intend to marry Gilda ? "

" I marry Gilda ! " Mr. Fleight exclaimed. " Good God, what an extraordinary thing to say ! "

From some faint sound behind her back Mrs. Leroy had an idea . . . .

"Gilda's probably listening to what we're saying," she said, "so you may as well be careful, young man."

"It doesn't seem very proper," Mr. Fleight said hopelessly, "that Miss Leroy should be listening. But I've no particular objection."

"Do you mean," Mrs. Leroy repeated, "to tell me that you don't know that Gilda is right-down clean—well, if it must come out—gone on you, as they say in the books, though I never like using such language myself?"

"On me!" Mr. Fleight exclaimed. "Entertains an affection for me! But it's the most amazing thing! I'm not the sort of person for women to——At least, I never imagined——"

"Of course," Mrs. Leroy said judicially, "it may not be you. It may be your motor cars and chauffeurs and things. You're not particularly much to look at; but you never know the foolish ideas gals get into their heads, and I'm bound to say she was in a mighty state of excitement before ever she knew you had so much as a motor car."

"But, God bless my soul!" Mr. Fleight said, "this is very embarrassing. In that case I ought not to stop here, and that would be most annoying. Of course, if it's merely a matter of the motor cars, she could have which ever one she liked of the four any day and all day long."

"A lot of good that would be to her," Mrs. Leroy said.

"I suppose," he answered rather disconsolately, "you mean that she wouldn't be able to afford to keep it up? But of course I could get her a position—say, in a hat shop. Or I could give her a hat shop for the matter of that. I should think if she were properly

dressed she'd look quite well enough to attract customers, wouldn't she? But I don't know much about that sort of thing."

He passed his hand rather wearily across his forehead. He had been a good deal shaken by the assault of the night before; and, although he was certainly gratified at the idea of having aroused the affections of a young lady, the affair was certainly a nuisance. "I suppose that was really why those ruffians fell upon me last night?" he said. "I'd never looked at it in that way."

"Bless my soul!" Mrs. Leroy said, in accents of real astonishment, "I don't believe you even know what the gal looks like."

"Oh, come!" Mr. Fleight answered; "I'm not so unobservant as all that. I mean, I should certainly recognise her if I met her anywhere where she could be expected to be. I mightn't perhaps if it were in Paris or Athens or the Duchess of Devonshire's ball, you know."

Mrs. Leroy exclaimed;

"Well, of all——" But she couldn't finish the ejaculation. She was so astonished at the complete way in which Mr. Fleight's manner proved that he hadn't entertained any designs whatever against her daughter. "Then," she continued, "if you didn't come here after Gilda, what in the wide world did you come for?"

Mr. Fleight looked at the ground in a state of the deepest dejection. He brought out at last the words:

"The comforts of home—that's what I came for."

Mrs. Leroy said:

"Well that's a queer start!"

"It isn't, you know," Mr. Fleight said wearily. "You see, I live in a sort of palace. It's all white

marble and porphyry, and the floors are so slippery that you can't move without feeling like a cat in walnut shells. And it's frightfully dull! Oh, quite frightfully dull!"

"I dare say it might be," Mrs. Leroy said judicially.

"So sometimes," Mr. Fleight continued, "I used to pull myself together and go out on adventures. I put on rather old clothes and wandered about for miles and miles. You see, my first father and mother were a bricklayer and his wife. And the happiest days of my life were when we moved to Sidlesham, near Selsey."

"I daresay they were," Mrs. Leroy interrupted him, "and though I don't see exactly what this has got to do with Gilda, I suppose it might come out if you tried to be clear."

"Quite happy days," Mr. Fleight rambled on. "The sea had come in a tidal wave over a lot of the marshes, and, as they wanted to put up a sea wall about two miles long and in a great hurry, they were employing bricklayers at very high wages. Father was a very good workman."

"But if your father was only a bricklayer——" Mrs. Leroy was beginning.

"He wasn't." Mr. Fleight cut her short, and he informed her succinctly and wearily that he was the child of a secret marriage.

"Then I hope you did something for them when you came into your own," Mrs. Leroy said.

"They always," he answered, "wanted to be the lodge-keeper to a lord and see him drive by in his carriage. So I got them the job of lodge-keeper to Lord Home of Ditton. But they both died within a year of it. They couldn't stand the change."

"Folks is like that," Mrs. Leroy commented. "Most

of them can't stand what they want when they get it, and them as can, want something else. But you don't tell me what your adventures were."

"You don't let me," Mr. Fleight said querulously. "You keep on interrupting. I used to visit them in their lodge—quite regularly once a week. It seemed to strengthen me. It did me good. As I was saying, it was at Sidlesham. We moved over there, father, mother and I. I remember I had to carry the old magpie in his cage and a tame rabbit as well. Father carried the arm-chair on his head, and the railway people tried to stop it because it wasn't luggage. There was a row; but I don't know what came of it. Well, behind the cottage there was a salt water pond. And there was a big boy called George Mason, and a little one we called Charlie, and me. I didn't go to school in those days, and we got an old bath from the rubbish in the blacksmith's yard, and we used to dob up the holes with clay and go sailing on the pond. I don't suppose I was ever dry in those days, because salt water doesn't evaporate, you know, and mother used to be a good deal worried." Mr. Fleight paused and again passed his hand over his eyes. "That's what I want," he said. "Strong, cheap tea at the end of the day, and cheap, strong cheese. And a rabbit that's been poached. And father will give you a taste of his beer if he's in a good temper, and you'll trot out to the wood-stack after dark and meet the other boys."

"Bless my soul!" Mrs. Leroy said, "you could have all that now. At least, you could have the strong tea and the cheese and the rabbit and a drop of ale."

"No, you can't!" Mr. Fleight said wearily. "In my palace the servants won't let you, and the women won't let you. And if you buy them and bring them in

yourself, they don't taste the same. And you have indigestion and things."

"Well, you're a poor flibberty jibbet of a man!" Mrs. Leroy exclaimed. "If I wanted things I'd see that I got them."

"Ah, but you can't!" Mr. Fleight said. "That's why I used to go upon adventures."

"Yes, tell me about them," Mrs. Leroy said.

"Oh, I've wandered for miles," he answered. "Through hundreds of miles of streets. But nothing ever happened. No one ever spoke to me, and I never could pluck up the courage ever to speak to anyone. Not in many years and years. There was just the once."

"When you spoke to Gilda?" Mrs. Leroy asked.

"No, when I spoke to Mr. Blood." Mr. Fleight answered. "I didn't speak to your daughter, she spoke to me. I was taking the train in one of my wanderings from High Street, Kensington, to Whitechapel, and while I was waiting for the train I saw an elderly working man talking to the girl at the tobacco stall. And he went on talking and laughing, and in a sort of way he reminded me of my foster-father. He had a kind of a country manner. So when he'd gone I went to the tobacco stall to buy a cigarette, and before I could speak, your daughter said to me:

"'Oh, father's forgotten his pocket-book!'

"It was lying on the place where you scratch the matches—the pocket-book he keeps the company's blue papers in, you know."

"He's always leaving it about," Mrs. Leroy said. "It's a wonder to me he ever gets his work done."

"So," Mr. Fleight continued, "I ran after him and gave it to him before he got to the top of the stairs.

And then I went back to the tobacco stall and your daughter thanked me and explained that the pocket-book was very important as her father was a foreman turncock, and so on, quite properly, of course. And then I got into the habit of buying cigarettes at the stall, and I used to chat about the prices of tobaccos and the way they were made up. And then one day I plucked up my courage—you see, you've no idea how difficult it is for a rich man to become really friendly with working people. It's almost impossible—so I asked your daughter to take me home and introduce me to you."

Mr. Fleight stopped, and after he had been silent for some time, Mrs. Leroy said:

"What you want is a mother," and after a time she added, "that's what you want."

Mr. Fleight said nothing at all. He was feeling very ill. And then suddenly there fell on his ear the sound of three loud crashes, such as are sometimes made by large motor cars. He sprang to his feet with an expression of panic. "My God!" he exclaimed, "that's Mr. Blood's car. I know the sound of his exhaust. He's tracked me down." He sank down once more upon the lemons. "But, of course, he would track me down," he said with an air of weary resignation.

A tinkle of the bell sounded from behind Mrs. Leroy.

"They'll be coming into the shop," she said, "but Gilda's there. I want to know . . . . "

The voice of Mr. Blood said from behind the sheet:

"Hullo, what's the matter? You can't lie there."

Mr. Fleight exclaimed:

"What's that?" And Mr. Blood's voice said more loudly:

"There's somebody seems to have fainted here."

The sheet bulged out portentously, and Mr. Blood appeared, draped by the white folds that ran diagonally across his large body and the slight form of Gilda Leroy that he was carrying in his arms. She had certainly fainted.

## V

"YOU'RE no earthly use to me, Mr. Mitchell!" Miss Macphail had been saying an hour before to an audience which was composed of Charlie Mitchell, himself, Mr. Cluny Macpherson, a dark young man called Raggett, who was the sub-editor, and a fair young lady, called Shipwright who was the secretary, as well as Miss Wilhelmina Macphail, who was quite in the background. Miss Macphail was pointing down at the rather limp sheet of paper lying upon the round table, which they were all encircling, all standing and all looking down. The slip of paper was the "contents" sheet of the *New Review*.

"There's not a single thing in it," Miss Macphail repeated, "that is of the least use to me."

It was at that moment that Mr. Blood came into the room, and Miss Macphail turned upon him agitatedly, and repeated for the third time her statement, that the *New Review* wasn't of the least use to her.

"It probably wouldn't be, you know," Mr. Blood said; "it wasn't really meant to be."

"But——" Augusta exclaimed, and there was a good deal of hard indignation in her voice.

"Of course," Mr. Blood ejaculated calmly, "if you wish to discuss private matters before this crowd, you can. But I warn you it won't do much good, and it may do you a good deal of harm."

He took up with irreverent hands the sheet of paper which everyone else in that small crowd regarded with

awe. For to everyone else in the room the appearance of the *New Review* was an event almost religious, since it seemed to give everyone there his or her chance—to everyone else except, perhaps, to Miss Shipwright, the secretary, who was more concerned by the fact that she had left her sleeve covers at home, and that in consequence she was in some danger of inking the real sleeves of her white muslin blouse. But, indeed, even Miss Shipwright had, in the last day or so, become infected with some little of the awe holding all these people, whom she regarded as rather odd maniacs.

Mr. Blood looked slowly down the list.

"It appears to be an excellent selection of writers," he said. "I don't see whom you've left out that you could have got into the first number. There's Block and Brown and Cocks and Dickinson and Hickman and Puddephatt and Shelley and Alexander White. What's the matter with the list?"

At that, with the exception of Mr. Mitchell they all began to talk at once. Mr. Cluny Macpherson said the list would have been all right if Charlie Mitchell had left out Block, Brown, Cocks, Dickinson, Hickman and Shelley. Puddephatt, of course, was a very fine stylist when he was up to the mark, but in the article that he happened to have contributed he certainly hadn't been in the vein. The sub-editor thought that it would be a very fine number but that, if they'd left out Brown, Cocks, Dickinson, Puddephatt and Shelley, Mr. Mitchell would have been able to include some new writers. All those authors were well established, and had even written themselves out. And surely the *Review* existed for the discovery of new talent. They certainly ought to have included Castor Chilcock, Nelson and O'Donohue. At that, Augusta

Macphail gave a little scream. "If ever you print anything by that man O'Donohue," she said, "I resign at once. I'm not going to have anything to do with a concern that prints hideous immorality."

Mr. Blood said, "There, there, Augusta!" and Miss Macphail shook herself viciously.

"My name's Macphail!" she exclaimed. "I tell you I've done with Bohemianism." The inhabitants of that room gave, in unison, one real scream of incredulous laughter.

"I mean it," Miss Macphail said. "There's nothing so vulgar as people calling each other by their Christian names. I'm determined to stop all vulgarity in my circle."

The rest of that small crowd reflected in abashed silence, for it struck them immediately that Augusta was right, and although everyone of them desired to be advanced in speech, thought and action, they knew very well there was an immense gulf fixed between that and vulgarity. In the silence of their reflections the clear and rather high voice of Miss Shipwright continued its remarks to Mr. Raggett—remarks which hitherto had been drowned by the other voices.

"There's not a single thing in it that any sane person would want to read." She hesitated for a moment when she discovered that everyone in the room was listening to her voice, but then, reflecting that in a way that this was Liberty Hall, she repeated with a clear, calm voice. "There's not a single thing in it that any sane person would want to read." She looked at Mr. Blood. "There's that story of Mr. Cocks'," she said. "I've been reading the proofs. It's shockingly badly printed, but I suppose that doesn't matter. But if anybody can tell me what it's all about, if it isn't about something so nasty that I

wouldn't soil my lips by making the suggestion—then all I can say is that it isn't about anything at all. And as for Mr. Puddephatt's poems—except that he doesn't have capitals at the beginnings of the lines—— But there, I suppose it's no affair of mine."

She had been looking at Mr. Blood, whom she regarded as the only sane person connected with the enterprise. And Mr. Blood accepted the tribute of her glance as a testimonial to his appearance of common sense.

"My dear," he said, "that's exactly the view that the public will take, and you've expressed it with extraordinary clearness, and it's really the one thing that you could have said that will absolutely please Mr. Mitchell, isn't it, Mr. Mitchell?"

Mr. Mitchell, who had said nothing, and never did say anything, said nothing now. He had made the *New Review* exactly what he had wanted to make it, and he didn't mean to talk. Mr. Cluny Macpherson, however, began:

"There was a man called Fulijcks, who started a magazine in Hungary. And I said to him in a mud bath——"

"But that's really the point," Mr. Blood's voice drowned that of Mr. Macpherson. "Mr. Mitchell has produced exactly the article that his employers wanted him to produce. What it amounts to, Miss Shipwright, is that if you'd really liked the magazine you'd have lost your job, because Mr. Rothweil would have shut it up. But as you dislike it so cordially your job will be absolutely safe, and you'll go on being the secretary to this *Review* for ever and ever—or, at any rate, until the supply of articles that you don't like is entirely exhausted in the world."

"Well, that's a comfort at any rate," Miss Shipwright

said, " for the work's well paid and it's easy—at any rate, it would be if Mr. Mitchell could be prevented from dropping his shaving paper and his washing bills into the basket for rejected manuscripts."

" You shouldn't," Mr. Mitchell said, " have put that basket exactly where the slop basin used to stand."

" You can't," Miss Shipwright retorted, " run this office as if it were a combination dressing room and sitting room for two bachelors. I'm a trained professional secretary and I must have some system."

Mr. Mitchell, a gentleman of profound laziness, had decided that he would run this periodical from the flat occupied by Mr. Macpherson and himself. And this flat containing only three rooms was extremely inconvenient for the purpose. Indeed, on Thursday nights, which Mr. Mitchell devoted to looking through manuscripts which had been submitted to him, Mr. Macpherson was unable to retire until four o'clock in the morning, since Mr. Mitchell, who was quiet but obstinate, insisted on covering Mr. Macpherson's bed with the manuscripts that he had accepted. Mr. Raggett, the sub-editor, was occupied until that hour in Mr. Macpherson's bedroom in the composing of letters, which he wrote on the washhand-stand, to explain why Mr. Mitchell did not like the contributions of various writers whose work he refused. Mr. Mitchell's own bedroom had to be left intact because immediately after the terrible labours of the Thursday night he had to fall into bed like a log and sleep until one o'clock on the following day.

Mr. Macpherson bore these hardships uncomplainingly and recognised that he deserved them for the honour and glory of it. In those three rooms they were engaged in saving British literature, and that was always something. Moreover, Mr. Macpherson had the great enjoyment of

being able to inform rejected contributors of what Mr. Mitchell really said about their work—which differed very much from what Mr. Raggett said in the letters composed upon Mr. Macpherson's washstand.

Mr. Blood pushed Miss Macphail rather roughly into his motor and told the chauffeur to drive to High Street Kensington Station on the Underground.

"It's perfectly true!" Miss Macphail said rather angrily. "I oughtn't to be driving about with you. It was all very well when I was just a roving sort of free lance——"

"I'll tell you what," Mr. Blood interrupted her roughly, "if you don't do what I tell you you'll find you'll be just a roving free lance to the end of your days."

Miss Macphail answered:

"I think I know all there is to know about journalism. And if you think that anything's going to be done with this rotten *Review* of yours and Charlie Mitchell's, you're absolutely mistaken. It can't succeed. It can't pay. The public doesn't want this high-brow sort of stuff. Why, you can't make head or tail of a single thing in it! Take the first poem, now——"

Mr. Blood said: "Well!" and Miss Macphail had a sort of shiver of discouraged ill-temper because she couldn't find any words to characterise the poem which opened the *New Review*.

"It's just simply rotten!" she brought out. "I tell you I can't afford to be connected with a thing that won't pay and can't pay. I want to belong to a real live journal." That was why she had given up the editorship of the *Halfpenny Weekly*. It was all very well that they were paying her a thousand a year. They wouldn't

be able to carry on this rotten *Review* for more than a year or so unless they were prepared to drop fifty thousand pounds. And she didn't suppose they were prepared for that. She didn't know much about this Mr. Fleight, or Mr. Rothweil, or whatever his name might be, but she had seen too many of these romantic, philanthropic, literary enterprises. They started with a tremendous flare and they banged up and rattled for about three months. Then the proprietor got tired of spending money and the editor went off with the till and they were all left in the cart. "I tell you what it is," Augusta declared, "either you will make your *Review* a real live paper or I give you a quarter's notice right here."

"Don't you think," Mr. Blood asked, "that you'd better listen to me?"

"No, I don't!" the lady answered. "Not until I've had my say. You listen to me. Crowther and Bingham rang me up this morning and offered to start a new paper for me on the lines of the *Ha'penny Weekly*. They offer me £1,200 a year, a ten years' contract for editing it, and ten thousand £1 shares as a bonus. That's what I've been playing for all these years and that's what you're practically asking me to give up. It isn't good enough, Mr. Blood."

"Now you listen to me, Augusta," Mr. Blood said. "You're a beautiful woman."

Augusta answered:

"That's why I intend to see that I take my pigs to the proper market."

"You're a beautiful woman," Mr. Blood repeated equably. "There really are few women more beautiful than you that I know of."

"If," Augusta said frostily, "that's your way of

beginning to ask permission to pay your attentions to my sister Wilhelmina you may as well save yourself the trouble."

" But," Mr. Blood pursued his sentence, " for the last year or so you've been going off. You can't stand the life. You want more luxury, more ease."—She needed domestic surroundings. It was not too late to pick her looks up again but it was almost too late. If she stopped in journalism for another five years she'd be just one of the poor, dried-up hacks of the Pocohontas Club. She might have saved a little money ; probably she wouldn't have ; she'd have dropped back into hack journalism. She would be beginning to think of wearing a chestnut front and her complexion would be all little lines and creases as if she had been sleeping on it all day and had only just got up.

Miss Macphail said :

" What's that ? What's that ? You dare to talk to me like that ? "

" I'm talking to you for your own good, Augusta," Mr. Blood said. " You think you know journalism and you don't. You think I don't and I do. I'll tell you, for instance, what'll become of your ten years' contract with Crowther and Bingham."—The paper would be the property of a limited company. Her contract would be with the company. She would make the paper a roaring success. Then the company would go bankrupt owing to faulty financial handling. She must know that was always what happened. Crowther and Bingham would buy the paper. Her contract would be with the company and so it would not be worth the paper it was written on. " You'll get thrown out and the paper will continue with some poor devil of an editor at £150 a year." Mr. Blood broke off to see what impression he was making.

He gazed at her meaningly and a strong colour mounted to her forehead.

"If you come to think of it," he continued, "you'll see that that's what'll happen. That's what always does happen to journalists nowadays."—When that did happen she would find it difficult to get another job. She would, may be, get one after a year and lose that in a year more. They were such extraordinarily fleeting persons—the journalists—because their hold on the public taste was so fleeting itself. They caught people now with ladies' costumes and actresses. But in five years time it would be perhaps slumming and field sports—something like that. Augusta couldn't go slumming; she didn't know anything about field sports and she never could. "You'll just have to go on with your clothes and your actresses," he finished. "You'll be tired and so worn out that you'll drop into the second rank and the third rank. Heaven knows where you won't descend to!"

"Oh, hang it all!" Augusta said, "don't go on croaking like that. You give me the shivers. Even if something like that did happen—and I don't say that things like that don't in journalism as it is to-day—I'd manage to catch on somewhere. A lucky investment—a hat shop?"

"You'll never," Mr. Blood said, "with all your obligations save enough to make an investment, and as for hat shops, did you ever hear of one that didn't fail? No, I'll tell you what it is, Augusta, the only thing you could hang on to is a man. You'll have to marry. It's the old story. And you've no particular hold over men. It's astonishing how little you attract the decent sort of Englishman. And your beauty will be failing with the hard work, and if you do marry,

it will be some sort of journalist like yourself, with a very precarious hold on his income. As likely as not he'll be an expense on your hands all the time. Now you're a good common-sensible sort of girl, you just reflect upon what I've been saying."

The car drew up in front of the portico which is before High Street Kensington Station.

"Just wait for me," Mr. Blood said, and he went down between the shops.

He had to buy a penny ticket before they would admit him to the station. Then he went quickly down the stairs and approached the tobacco stall. A young person with very golden hair and a mealy white complexion was affectionately lighting a cigarette for a boy with many pimples on his face. Mr. Blood waited until the boy had taken the next train. Then he approached the stall and removed his hat with elaboration.

"Mr. Fleight's friend?" he asked, with a comparatively deferential manner.

"I don't know who he may be," the young person answered.

"He's a man," Mr. Blood said, "who comes here rather frequently to talk to the young lady in charge."

"Then it can't be me," she answered. "I'm only a substitute going from place to place when one of the young ladies is taken ill. It'll be Gilda Leroy you want."

"Yes, it's Miss Leroy I want," Mr. Blood said. "Can you give me her address?"

The young person called to a porter who was sweeping the platform.

"Hi!" she exclaimed, "here's a gent wants Miss Leroy's address. Can you give it him?"

The porter, who had red hair and a rather scowling face, approached Mr. Blood and gazed at his feet.

" You ain't a tec," he said, " I can tell by your boots. What's all this questioning about Gilda Leroy ? There's been one of you here already."

" She's likely to come in for a good thing," Mr. Blood answered. " Money, quite a lot of money."

The porter pushed forward his peaked cap and scratched his red hair.

" You appear quite the gent," he said. " I daresay you don't mean her any harm, and if you did, you could find out her address in no time from the company, so I don't see why I shouldn't oblige you."

Mr. Blood gave him a shilling.

" I don't rightly exactly know where she does live," the porter said. " I've tried to walk out with her, and I've tried to see her home. But she gives herself out as being above the like of me. Though why she should I don't know, since I've every chance of rising to be a station master, or I should have if I hadn't a bit made a fool of myself with the union in the last strike."

He considered for a moment and then he said :

" Her father's a foreman turncock of the C Division in Westminster, and he lives somewhere in Henry Street neighbourhood. You could get certain news of him at the waterworks just near here, because I've seen him come about once a week to get his directions from there, and he'll stop and chat with his daughter for a minute or so."

" And what sort of girl is Gilda Leroy ? " Mr. Blood asked.

" She's as quiet and as respectable as she could be, and if it's you that's going to leave her money, I can only say you couldn't find a more deserving object."

"That's what I expected," Mr. Blood said. "It would be that sort of person that would appeal to Mr. Fleight."

"I don't know anything about that," the porter said. "Tastes differ."

During the short drive up to the waterworks Mr. Blood did not say anything material, even though Augusta addressed to him the question:

"I suppose you've got some proposition to make to me yourself since you cry so much stinking fish about my chances?"

He only answered:

"You go on thinking it out, Augusta."

He got the address of Mr. Leroy without much difficulty from the clerk in charge of the waterworks' office. And then, reseating himself in the motor beside Augusta, he said:

"I want you to get rid of your German accent as much as possible. You need to be as Teutonic as you like in appearance. But not to the ear. It's apt to make people guy you."

Augusta said, "Well!"

"I want you, too," Mr. Blood said, "to use much less slang. Of course, the better classes use a good deal of slang, but it's not your sort. Your sort is schoolboy and journalist's slang, and it's rather too hard and ugly. Similarly, I want you to be less masculine in your attitudes. Don't you swagger about and pose like the male proprietor of five cheap daily papers. You've never known any women; now you're going to meet a good many. You look out and catch their style. I'm going to introduce you to my cousin, Mrs. Dumerque. You try and get her to like you. I don't say try to model yourself on *her*, mind, but if you can get her to like

you—if you can key yourself down enough, you'll do extremely well. You might model yourself on Wilhelmina for the matter of that."

"I thought that was coming," Miss Macphail said.

"Well," Mr. Blood answered, "Wilhelmina is a nice person."

Mr. Blood remained silent for a moment, looking at the monument to Queen Victoria in front of Kensington Church which the car was passing.

"Did you ever see such a monstrosity?" he exclaimed.

Augusta answered:

"It seems all right to me."

"That's just what you've got to get rid of," Mr. Blood said. "I don't say you've got to like the right sort of thing, but you've got to know when not to praise the Albert Memorial."

"But the Albert Memorial is a very fine thing," Augusta said. "It has three stars in the German guide that I used when I first came to London."

"It would, you know," Mr. Blood said; "and that's just what you've got to avoid. You've got to make your husband pension the right sort of young poet and buy the right sort of picture."

Miss Macphail said:

"What is all this fairy tale?"

"This is your life, Augusta," Mr. Blood said. "Your life and my fun."

"You talk like God Almighty," Augusta commented.

"That is rather my attitude," Mr. Blood answered. "You seem such an extraordinarily ignorant lot of people. You're all climbers more or less, and I am so exactly where I want to be that I seem to sit on a pinnacle. If it amuses me to stick a finger down into the middle of you and give some of you a lift, why shouldn't I?"

"That's all very well," Augusta said, "but business is *Geschaeft.* I want to know what my salary is to be?"

"Now, look here, Augusta," Mr. Blood answered; "now you've got over your bad temper, you know perfectly well that Mr. Fleight will keep the *Review* going for five years at the very least. He couldn't afford to stop it. It would make him too much of a laughing stock. You don't know much about this sort of life."

"Do I get a five years' contract?" Miss Macphail asked.

"Yes, of course you do," Mr. Blood answered. "Five years at twelve hundred a year. We aren't going to give you less than Crowther and Bingham have offered you. But understand you must spend it." She was to have her old mother over from Germany and to take a nice house down Kensington way. She was to have a studio for Wilhelmina and a brougham for herself and for her mother to take the air in. She could just about do that much on twelve hundred a year.

"But who's my contract with?" Augusta asked. "A limited company?"

Mr. Blood answered:

"Don't be a fool, Augusta! I tell you you're in a different sort of life. You can have a contract with Mr. Fleight or with me personally. Or you may have six thousand pounds down for the five years if you like, though I shouldn't advise it."

"No," Augusta said reflectively, "I don't think I want six thousand pounds down. I should get the interest, of course, but it might make me extravagant. You never can tell. I'd like a contract with you personally." She knew he was a very rich man and she could understand his sort of honour. She continued:

"I don't believe much in Mr. Fleight. These Jewish

fortunes have a way of disappearing. They're like fairy gold in fairy tales, and I'm German enough to like to listen to such stories but not to depend on them." English people were honourable when they were rich enough to afford it, though they were the most dishonourable people in the world when they weren't. But *you're* all right. I know you can afford it, so I'll just take a personal contract with you."

"But mind, Augusta," Mr. Blood said, "You must attend to your duties."

"What *are* my duties?" Augusta asked. "I'm assistant editress."

"You try to understand this," he answered. "Your watchword is to be: 'All for Mr. Fleight!' You've never got to miss a chance of giving him a lift up and you'll all—all of you—be so hung on to him that as he goes up he'll carry you all up with him, hanging in a bunch on to his skirts."

"But what have I got to do?" Augusta asked.

"Oh, you'll have millions of things to do," Mr. Blood said. "Now, for instance, in just about a month's time I want you to get up a great entertainment to celebrate the first number of the *Review*. You'll get it up yourself, please, under the direction of Mitchell and myself." She was to ask absolutely everybody that Charlie Mitchell by any possibility thought could be a contributor to the *New Review*. She would have to sit about with Charlie, and every time he mentioned a name in the ordinary course of conversation she was to ask him: "Is that the sort of person?" And it didn't matter who it was—if it were the sort of person, she was to send them a ticket for the entertainment. The only sort of people that she would have to keep out were the people she knew before. Any time she had ever heard of anybody

being called a smart man, meaning a smart journalist, she was to put a black mark against his name. " If you leave that sort of person a hungry outsider whilst expensive functions are going on," Mr. Blood finished, " he'll boom your enterprise till it looks to the public as big as twelve balloons in one."

" There's something in that," Augusta said meditatively. " I suppose we journalists really do respect the persons who kick us in the face."

" Now at this entertainment," Mr. Blood said, " you'll have to be everywhere, with Mr. Fleight beside you. Understand, you'll just have to shove him in." She was to get up the entertainment, officially, as assistant editress of the *Review*. It didn't matter how blatantly she puffed Mr. Fleight to the Intellectuals. That sort of person hadn't any social taste. As long as they knew a man was rich and that they were likely to wolf something out of him, they would cotton to him like pigs to clover. " And it'll be your business to let them know it. You'll have every chance. You'd better engage the Russian dancers from the Opera, and you'd better have the Opera orchestra, too. Fix the time for 11.30——"

" But, I say," Miss Macphail said, " the cost will be enormous."

" It must be enormous," Mr. Blood answered. " This is bribery on a wholesale scale." He paused for a moment. " Have you got a good memory ? " he said. " Yes, I seem to remember that you have. Then there's another thing that you've got to do." She was to find out the name of the last book, and the last picture, and the last art wash-basin, of as many people as she possibly could, who were to come to the blessed entertainment. She was to be able to give Mr. Fleight a

pointer when she introduced him to them. As often as not he'd know more about them than she, because he had some real feeling for art. Mr. Blood would send along a fairly large contingent of countesses, and that sort of thing. But she had better leave them to him and Wilhelmina. She was not so likely to shock them. Why Mr. Blood dragged in Wilhelmina was this. Augusta was to make the house she took in Kensington a sort of centre for the sort of crowd that would come to the entertainment. He wanted her to get them, as far as possible, to pay their dinner calls at her house afterwards. He wanted her to keep them together. "You'll probably," he concluded, "do all right with the one sort, but Wilhelmina is the one of you who has the best chance of getting really good people to come and see her in her studio."

"Of course, Wilhelmina's a perfect dear," Augusta said. "I don't suppose any of your countesses will be able to resist her."

"I don't know so much about that," Mr. Blood said. "I can't resist her myself, but all women aren't like me, and we must see how the cat jumps."

They were under the shadow of Westminster Cathedral tower, and Mr. Blood began to close the interview.

"Of course, there'll be plenty more for you to do," he said, "but that will be enough for you to keep in your head for one day."

"It still sounds like a silly fairy tale," Augusta meditated, "except for the way you say it. The way you say it makes it seem a nasty dirty business. I don't really like your cynicism."

"It is a nasty dirty business," Mr. Blood said. "It's the dirty comedy of life being unrolled before your eyes. It's the thing that modern life has become the disgusting

thing that it has become. I'm trying to crush it all up into a short period so as to make the affair all the more an object lesson—or, rather, all the more of a joke, because I don't care whether anybody learns anything from it or not. I'm not a social reformer." Augusta would see all these people struggling and cadging and grabbing at the money that they would be throwing about.

"Climbers?" Mr. Blood began again suddenly, "Why you and our friend, Fleight, shall climb in three months to a position that, normally, it takes ten years to attain to. And doesn't it make you think that the whole thing is a disgusting affair, that life is more foul than it ever conceivably was, and that God has gone to sleep? If He hadn't He'd wash the whole unclean lot of us with one tidal wave into the Atlantic."

"I don't know anything about that," Augusta said. "I don't see how I could be expected to."

The motor drew up before the whitewashed archway that was the entrance into the Mews.

Mr. Blood walked straight through the Leroys' shop and into the back. He was anxious to discover what sort of people they were. He was followed closely by Miss Macphail and, when he came upon the apparently lifeless body of Gilda Leroy, it struck him as an odd circumstance. But he got the story very quickly pieced together.

## VI

AND that night they were all dining at Corbury together—Mr. Fleight, Mr. Blood, Mr. Reginald Blood, Drupe the agent, Miss Macphail, Miss Wilhelmina Macphail, Mr. Blood's cousin, Mrs. Dumerque and the parson's wife, who had been persuaded, on short notice, to make up an even number. Later, Mr. Mitchell, Mr. Raggett and Mr. Macpherson were coming down to spend the night, for they had determined the next morning to recommence an even more energetic canvas of the constituency of Byefleet. Mr. Blood had made Miss Macphail bring all these people together by the use of the telephone, and of Mr. Fleight's four motor cars and Mr. Blood's two. And, since Miss Macphail had done this very efficiently—explaining, for instance, quite clearly to Mrs. Dumerque, why her cousin desired her presence that very evening, and that Mr. Fleight's car would be at her door at six o'clock—Mr. Blood was quite pleased with Miss Macphail. He recited, indeed, her praises to Mr. Fleight, and that gentleman thanked her with a grave deference. It was the first time that Mr. Fleight had spoken directly to Augusta, and he said he felt assured that they would be able to work smoothly together, and between them make a very efficient job of things, because Mr. Blood had told him to regard her as his private secretary for certain purposes. She thought him a horrid little man.

They led thus for some days a hurried and strenuous existence. They canvassed, uttering frenzied sheaves

of promises and—a thing that had never been known in an election in that district before—they carried note-books in which they wrote down what those promises were. For the intention was that every promise should be kept. That was the great advantage of Mr. Fleight's wealth. They took, as a band, their general instructions from Mr. Blood. They weren't to dwell in any way upon the political question. They were just to say when politics were mentioned: "Oh, you can't expect us to talk about these things. Mr. Rothweil tells you all about that in his speeches. What he wants to know is, what is needed in the country districts. So that, if you'll let us know what are your views, or what are your grievances, we'll undertake to lay them before Mr. Rothweil, and it's ten chances to one that they will be remedied."

Then from every cottager grievances would come like a flood. Mr. Fleight found himself pledged upon the very first day of the new campaign to the erection of pumps, to the digging of wells, to the founding of at least one almshouse, to the straightening of a nasty corner of road where the motors came round too sharply; to the endowment of a free dispensary, to the creation and endowment of three football clubs and one quoits club, and to the fighting of a right-of-way case. Of actual bribery—the direct purchase of votes—there was practically none committed by these amateur canvassers. In the last twenty-five years Byefleet had been twice disfranchised for indulging in the political misdemeanour, and it had to be gone about very carefully by selected agents of Mr. Drupe's in the public houses.

It was Augusta who was the most dangerous in this particular. Not being very English she could not

be made to see the necessity for indirectness in political corruption. She just simply couldn't see it. As she said at dinner on the second day, if Mr. Fleight was going to spend forty thousand pounds on bribery—for what was setting up a free dispensary and the quoits club but just simply buying votes in a stupid way, so that you couldn't be certain of getting them?—she couldn't for the life of her see why it wouldn't be cheaper and more useful and much more certain to pay forty shillings a head per vote. They all tried to make her see it; even Wilhelmina could see it, but it just simply wouldn't penetrate to Augusta's intelligence.

On the third evening she really seriously perturbed them. They were all, as is natural in these cases, giving their experiences of voters' humour. And when it came to Augusta's turn, her prime jest came out something like this.

There was a thatched cottage in Dumbwoman's Lane which led up to Polecat Hill. And in this cottage there dwelt a very old hedger. When Augusta had entered and had explained that her mission was political, the very old man had said:

"Ah, about that vote! It do fair terrify me, lying awake at nights to think which I be to vote for"—"terrify" being the Kentish for "worry to death." And even when Augusta with great volubility had explained why he certainly must vote for Mr. Fleight, at the end of a quarter of an hour he had just shaken his very old head and repeated: "It do fair terrify me." He really had not understood a word that Augusta had said, and after a moment's pause he added, "because 'tis like this here. This here opposition candidate has been here and he never give me nothing. And that there Government candidate hasn't never been here.

But what I says is, if he had have been here he might have given me something, so I think I shall vote for he."

This anecdote caused considerable laughter at the dinner table. But it changed to panic, when Augusta said :

" I just couldn't stand such nonsense, so I pulled out my purse and gave him a couple of pounds."

Mr. Blood at the top of the table said :

" Good Heavens, Augusta ! "

" I know," Augusta commented firmly, " that, being a woman, I'm not fit to have a vote. But if I'm not as fit to have a vote as that old fool, and if the whole of the way you men go about your elections isn't just rotten——"

Mr. Blood said, " Augusta," in an imperative tone. Then he stood up. " Now just tell me," he said, " was there anything in that cottage that you could want to buy—a grandfather's clock or an old chair ? "

" There wasn't anything," Augusta said. " It was a dirty cottage built of mud."

" Wasn't there even a cat ? " Mr. Blood said.

" Yes, there was a nasty, dirty cat," Augusta answered. " The old woman was nursing it all the time I was there, and it made me feel sick. I hate cats."

" Oh, no, you don't, Augusta," Mr. Blood said, " you positively love cats. You're a great connoisseur of cats. And you recognised that the cat the old woman was nursing was a Pomeranian of an unknown breed."

" I didn't," Augusta said. " It was a nasty, dirty cat."

" Oh, yes you did," Mr. Blood said. " You were so enthusiastic about that cat that you paid for it. Thirty shillings down and three shillings and sixpence a week for its keep until you are able to make a home for it."

And he took Augusta straight away from the table to the cottage in Dumbwoman's Lane, where he found it comparatively difficult to explain the nature of the transaction to the very deaf old woman, who maintained that the cat was the only joy of her heart. It was however achieved in time. And when they got back to Corbury, they found that Augusta's mother had arrived. Augusta had been made to telegraph to her and to send her the money for her passage two days before. She was a fierce-looking old lady, with a very virile nose and very white hair, so that, since she had very little English and could not be made to understand why she had been suddenly summoned to these distant and barbarous climes—she presented much the appearance of, and sounded very much like, an enraged cockatoo.

She was, however, dressed in very excellent black silk, and she really solved the difficulty for Mr. Blood. Augusta was too dangerous to be used as a canvasser, and, at the same time, she had been almost too decorative to be used unchaperoned, on the decorative side of the campaign. Mr. Blood had a theory that the British voter loves a candidate who goes about with a fiancée in his motor car. But it was imperative that that fiancée should have a mother, or at least an aunt, somewhere in the neighbourhood. Thus Frau Macphail was almost a godsend. For the rest of the time she drove out every day and all day long, sitting beside Augusta, on the back seat of Mr. Fleight's immense car. In front of her would sit Mr. Fleight and Mr. Drupe, the agent. And, since nothing would make Frau Macphail understand in the least what they were doing, she got it finally into her head that Mr. Fleight, whom she knew to be a soap merchant, was travelling

in his own soap. Thus, every time that he came out of a cottage she would lean forward and touch Mr. Fleight on the knee, exclaiming :

" Good sales ? Gutes Geschaeft ? Wie ? Was ? "

She also vaguely imagined that Augusta intended her to marry Mr. Drupe. And, in that way, they travelled in harmony over many miles of country. At every cottage that they came to they would stop for five minutes, and at every schoolroom or meeting-house in a village, Mr. Fleight would go in and address the meeting. On one occasion, when his voice had completely broken down, towards tea-time, and when he had exhausted his stock of lozenges, Augusta herself tried her hand at speaking. She was perfectly calm and composed, and her voice was very loud. She told the audience of farm labourers that Mr. Rothweil's opponent was a rodden fool ; that the Government were a " rodden lot of Bipple," and that if they didn't vote for Mr. Fleight the country would go to ruin and the " togs." At each of her remarks old Frau Macphail, who had climbed on to the platform, nodded her black bonnet, which resembed that of the late Queen Victoria, and exclaimed :

" Ja, Ja that ist so. I tell you that ist so."

And Augusta's speech was so exactly of the type desired by rural audiences, that Mr. Drupe, without delay, enlisted her as a permanent speaker. He couldn't be loud enough in his praises of her to Mr. Fleight. He said she was just exactly what they wanted. Most people thought that the Government were a rotten lot, and that Mr. Fleight's opponent was a rotten fool. But most people hadn't got the courage to say so in such direct terms. Even Augusta's German accent was not disagreeable to the country people. They all had accents

of their own, and Augusta's rather pleased them as a variation from Mr. Fleight's pure London enunciation, which struck them as being superior and slightly painful to listen to. In Augusta, Mr. Drupe said, Mr. Rothweil had a very valuable and efficient ally. And Mr. Fleight agreed that she was a very notable young woman.

They were having, in fact, in Corbury, what Lennards, the butler, who was old-fashioned in his speech, called "a high old time." It did him good to hear them at dinner, and made him think that the old house was being brought up-to-date. It was quite different from the sober, quiet and rather disagreeable gentlemen whom, as a rule, the master had down for the shooting in October. And there was less beer drunk—which pleased Lennards—than during the master's cricket week in July.

They all lived in great harmony. Even Mrs. Dumerque, the banker's wife, and Mr. Blood's first cousin—a gentle, elegant and quiet woman of about forty, though with her hair quite grey—agreed to like the Macphail woman and find a positive respect for Mr. Fleight. She said he was such a gentleman, and this was really more than Mr. Blood could have expected. He knew his cousin spoke of most of his proceedings as "Arthur's ways," and tolerated them as oddities. So that it really gave him great pleasure when his cousin, almost the only person in the world for whom he had a real respect and a deep affection, seemed to like Fleight and his band for their own sakes, and not merely to tolerate them as being one of his whims. Mr. Blood recognised that there was never any knowing exactly what line the great lady would take, but he knew she could be very charming when it struck her as being

appropriate, and he was pleased because he liked Wilhelmina, and wished her to have good fortune.

Mr. Reginald Blood had taken to canvassing very energetically for Mr. Fleight's opponent. But even this did not disturb the general harmony, for Mr. Reginald was a very odd creature. Side by side with Mr. Blood's detachment and a practical intellect for which Mr. Blood himself had the very greatest respect, his nature contained a very strong feeling—a feeling that was almost a passion—for the traditions of their race. He didn't mind his brother's girding at the ministry, just as a good Catholic will not object very much to another Catholic's jeering at his Bishop's administration of the diocesan fund, or his putting into operation the admonitions of the encyclical called *Pascendi Greges*. But, he had the greatest respect for his house's Whig traditions. He had never, till then, wanted to do anything for Whiggism or the Liberal party. But it struck him as going too far when Mr. Blood afforded an Opposition candidate the hospitality of Corbury and active advice as to how to conduct the campaign, though even Mr. Blood did not carry the insolence so far as actually to support the Rothweil candidature by speeches or canvassing. His brother's actions finally stung Mr. Reginald to such a pitch that he positively announced his fixed intention to canvass such of the Corbury tenantry as were within the division of Byefleet, in the interests of Mr. Fleight's opponent. This put the tenants into a considerable quandary because, try as they would, they couldn't get any instructions from Mr. Blood himself, whereas they knew that Mr. Rothweil was certainly a friend and a guest of Mr. Blood. They simply did not dare to do what Mr. Reginald wished, just as they simply did not dare to vote for Mr. Rothweil.

It looked, therefore, as if nearly one hundred and twenty voters would not take part in the election. And this disobedience on the part of the retainers of his house irritated Mr. Reginald so much that he positively spoke at one of the meetings of the Government candidate in the Byefleet Market Hall. A coarse man called from the back during one of his pauses, the words " washing basket ! " Mr. Reginald, standing on high, quivered, and several people imagined that he must faint, but instead of that he grew positively violent. That, he said, was the sort of thing that his opponents had to bring against sound argument.

From that day onward, Mr. Reginald, his lean form trembling, and his grey beard all a-quiver, waving his thin arms, delivered speeches that drove any member of his audience who happened to belong to the Opposition almost into a frenzy of rage. One of his accusations against the Opposition newspapers was actually mentioned in the London Press, and a question was asked about it in Parliament. It made Mr. Reginald appear the most violent of doctrinaire democrats, and next day Mr. Blood had a letter from the Chancellor of the Exchequer—a note scrawled on a half sheet of paper, containing the words : " Thanks, you *have* pulled your brother together."

But Mr. Reginald's public utterances did nothing to disturb the harmony of the Corbury dinners. Mr. Reginald had taken possession of one of his brother's cars, and would dash home from a meeting just in time to dress for dinner and to appear, languid and half asleep, as he generally did appear. Mr. Fleight would have liked to argue one or two points with his host's brother. He was curious to know how it was that Mr. Reginald could import so much passion into politics.

But, true to the high English standard of good form, sportsmanship and the affectation of indifference, Mr. Fleight never ventured upon controversial grounds. They were tabooed in the house, though canvassing stories were quite freely told, and Mr. Reginald once or twice narrated his own experiences in the effort to obtain promise of votes. They also debated as to the chances of the candidates, and once, after the ladies had withdrawn, Mr. Fleight who was sitting next to Mr. Reginald, turned on him point blank and said:

"What *do* you think are my chances?"

Mr. Reginald answered without a moment's hesitation:

"You'll get in. Our man hasn't got a chance. Even if the Ebury lot"—those were the Corbury tenants—"voted for our man you'd have a majority of a couple of score or so. If they don't you may be nearly two hundred up."

Mr. Fleight said: "Ah!" and Mr. Reginald continued:

"It's a matter of personalities. Our man's a perfectly hopeless candidate. He's got a perpetual cold in his head and I should say he drugs or something. It's a downright cruelty to bores to have turned him on. It's a disgrace."

"And I?" Mr. Fleight said rather timidly.

"Oh, you," Mr. Reginald said, with a note of contempt in his voice that he suddenly modified to one almost of kindliness. "No one objects to you. And you manage to cut so much more of a dash—your money does. Our man is nearly as rich as you. Quite as rich I daresay, but he looks like a decayed army pensioner and behaves like a crossing sweeper."

"You think," Mr. Fleight said, and then he went at it boldly, "You think my appearance isn't against me?"

" Your appearance ? " Mr. Reginald said with a quite questioning expression. " Oh, your appearance is all right. It rather helps you. What with your reputation of enormous wealth and your tininess people are inclined to pity you as if you were the baby heir to an imperial throne. You'll probably get a good few votes on account of that feeling. You're a sort of effective anti-climax to your reputation."

" But," Mr. Fleight stammered valiantly, for he wanted to get to the bottom of it, " My eyes . . . my eyes, you know."

" Oh, your black eyes," Mr. Reginald said, " that's one of the smartest electioneering dodges my devil of a brother ever put out."

At the top of the table Mr. Blood made a gentle, ironic sound like a very small laugh.

" That's worth almost everything to you," Mr. Reginald said.

Mr. Fleight was overwhelmed with confusion. " That romantic story," Mr. Reginald continued, " about your studying the conditions of the poor and going slumming and getting bashed by a gang of roughs . . . why our man would no more have thought of that than he would have thought of addressing marriage proposals to the late dowager Empress of China."

" But you don't mean to say," Mr. Fleight said in an aghast tone, " that you think my eyes are—aren't——"

" If you're trying to challenge me to say your eyes are touched up," Mr. Reginald said, " you'd better say so. Of course, I know they're painted. Didn't I see my brother doing it and Lennards helping him in the library three mornings ago ? "

" But, confound it," Mr. Fleight said, " they were painting it out not putting it in."

Mr. Reginald looked straight at his brother who was taking a slow sip of port.

"If a couple of old hands," he said, "like Arthur and Lennards can't paint out a black eye better than that it's deucedly odd. But of course there's no saying."

He smiled rather pleasantly with his lean face because Wilhelmina Macphail was coming into the long room and approaching Mr. Fleight. He smiled because he liked Wilhelmina and also because, through her, he had been able to play one of his tricks on Mr. Blood. He had, in fact, persuaded Wilhelmina to undertake the job of closing the shutters. He had assured her of the immense necessity of securing Corbury from heat; he had told her that they would all be dying of it if the task wasn't efficiently carried out through the morning. In this way he had subtracted one from his brother's small army of canvassers and had set himself at liberty to work for Mr. Fleight's opponent. It wasn't the kind of trick he set much store by but it amused him to score off Mr. Blood in very small matters. He would certainly not have done it in any large one.

Wilhelmina came to tell Mr. Fleight that Augusta said there was a man he must see. Augusta had been detailed as Mr. Fleight's private secretary to interview any visitors who came to see him at Corbury. She was to stave off those who did not seem to be of importance, and thus Mr. Fleight had a little rest from time to time.

Mr. Fleight went away with Wilhelmina, and in the morning room he found a policeman along with Augusta. The policeman said Scotland Yard had telephoned through to say that they had caught three of those hooligans and would be obliged if Mr. Rothweil could make it

convenient to be present at Westminster Police Court for a few minutes next morning. Mr. Fleight said :

" Good heavens ! "

It appeared to him to be a calamity that the men who had assaulted him had been caught. He hated the idea of prosecution.

Then he sent Wilhelmina for Mr. Blood. He exhausted in the meantime his stock of ejaculations as to the inconvenience, as to the almost impossibility of his being at Westminster next morning. Augusta, on the other hand looked at him in her cold and businesslike manner and said that there wasn't any earthly reason why he shouldn't go. It was his duty to the public to see that these hooligans got what they deserved. And as for his meetings next morning she could address them for him just as well as he could. She could do it better, even, because she could praise him a great deal more openly than he could praise himself.

The policeman said nothing and Mr. Blood, when he came in, just remarked to the policeman :

" That'll be all right, Mr. Rothweil will be at Westminster to-morrow at a quarter past ten. You can telephone through to Scotland Yard."

The policeman was going away when Mr. Blood desired to know how they had found the men. It was a button, the policeman said—a button from the tunic of one of the Irish Fusiliers that had been found lying beside the doorstep of the Leroy's shop. They had had the men paraded and there was one with a new button sewn on to an old tunic. Then they had dropped sharply on two of the soldier's pals and had got confessions out of them.

The policeman went away, Mr. Blood telling him to get something for himself in the kitchen.

Mr. Fleight turned wearily to Mr. Blood.

"Is this prosecution absolutely necessary?" he said. "It's very distasteful to me."

"I'm sorry," Mr. Blood answered, quite dispassionately, "but it's your contribution to the campaign, not mine. You've heard, according to Reginald, that your black eyes have been worth some votes to you. But it's more or less necessary that you should legitimise the black eyes."

"I suppose," Mr. Fleight replied, with the resigned air of a weary donkey starting again beneath a heavy load "I've just got to make it clear that I wasn't mixed up in some brawl about a woman—that I was really studying the home-life of the poor."

"You can thank your lucky stars," Mr. Blood said, "that you weren't mixed up in some brawl about some woman."

Mr. Fleight was about to say that he certainly wasn't, when Lennards, the butler, came in and said that the policeman wanted to speak to Mr. Rothweil.

"Oh, we don't want any more policemen," Mr. Blood said. "I told the fellow to go and get some beer. Mr. Rothweil will have to start off to speak in twenty minutes. It's his most important meeting, and I don't want him to be agitated."

Lennards, however, replied that this wasn't the same policeman as the first. That one was in the kitchen and this one was at the front door. He said his business was urgent and wouldn't take more than a minute. He had to be shown in.

The second policeman was much stouter than the first, and he had an absolutely expressionless voice. He pulled a paper out of his belt and began to read

what he said was a message that they had received from the Hampstead Coroner's office :

A young woman—his monotonous voice read out—by the name of Gilda Leroy, had committed suicide in a colonnade leading from the front door of Palatial Hall, Hampstead, the residence of Aaron Rothweil. She had called to ask for Mr. Fleight the evening before and, hearing that he was not at home, she was thought to have gone away, and the body was not discovered till next day, because she appeared to have staggered into some bushes a little way off the path. The coroner wished Mr. Fleight or Mr. Rothweil to attend at his court next morning at eleven in order to give evidence.

The policeman folded up his piece of paper again, stuck it in his belt, and remarked to Mr. Blood :

" I wish you a good evening, sir."

Then he, too, went away.

A profound silence reigned in the dim enormous room. Six tall candles burned before a mirror on a high, carved mantel-shelf. But their reflections were very dim because the mirror was so ancient. Augusta was sitting at a writing-table gazing straight in front of her as if she did not see that this was any affair of hers. Mr. Fleight had sunk down into a very high chair with a back of old tapestry. Above his miserable, white face, decorated with two black dabs under the eyes, two carved lions appeared to dispute. But he was sunk down so low that he had the appearance of a dead rag.

" It's dreadful," he muttered. " Oh, it's dreadful ! "

Mr. Blood, who had been gazing at Augusta, and reflecting. remarked :

" I don't see how it's dreadful. It's so just exactly what I'd expected, anyhow. But it may turn out

awkward. What do you say, Augusta ? He was going to the house of this girl when he was assaulted, and the girl commits suicide on the doorstep of his house next evening."

" I should think it might turn out jolly awkward indeed," Augusta said coolly. And she added, " Perfectly rodden."

Mr. Blood said irritably :

" I wish you wouldn't use that word, Augusta. I wish you'd forget that such a word existed."

" It's jolly effective when I'm speaking to yokels," Augusta exclaimed.

"Well, but we aren't yokels," Mr. Blood retorted. " If Mr. Drupe wants you to speak to-night don't you dare to use it. You're going to have a county audience as far as there's any county left."

" It's miserable," Mr. Fleight said. " It's appalling ! Such nice people they were and this will be a disaster to them—nice people ! "

" I can't help that," Mr. Blood said determinedly. " Now, look here, you must speak to-night, understand ! You've just got to speak and you just pitch it in. You be positively thunderous about the calumnies that the other side are spreading about you. You just remember that it's none of your fault. None of your fault at all. And that to-morrow every person in the constituency will be saying that it is. You just try and nobble the upper classes before the lower ones—the servants and the labourers—get on to you. For that's what they'll do."

Mr. Fleight breathed out the words :

" It's dreadful having to speak." And then he added quickly, as if he were in terror of Mr. Blood, " I know I've got to . . . I'm dreadfully ashamed of myself for

having spoiled your plans. I'll attend to what you say ; I'll take that line exactly as you ask it."

Mr. Blood said, a little more genially :

" I'll speak to you kindly to-night about the psychological aspect of it, but not till after you've spoken at this meeting. If I spoke to you kindly now you'd probably break down."

Mr. Fleight said :

" Yes, yes, you're very kind to take so much trouble over me. You're perfectly right."

He let himself down from the high chair and crawled miserably out of the room. He was all bent up like a bird whose spine has been injured, and they could see him through the open door scrambling miserably into his motor coat.

" Look here," Mr. Blood said in a low voice to Augusta, " don't let him talk about it till after the meeting. After it's over, in the motor, you turn out the light and let him weep on your shoulder. Try to remember that you're a woman and not the tin-god of a lot of ha'penny journalists. It's the duty of a woman to console."

" I don't know," Augusta said, " he's such a little worm."

" But remember that he's a very miserable little worm," Mr. Blood said.

" Oh, of course, I'll do my best," Augusta answered. " I should have done so anyhow." And she went off after her mother and Mr. Fleight, who were already in the car.

In the dining-room amongst the chairs and port glasses that were still upon the long table Wilhelmina Macphail had sat down unobtrusively beside Mr. Reginald Blood. Mr. Mitchell, Mr. Macpherson and Mr. Raggett had gone

off already to form part of the audience at Mr. Fleight's meeting.

"I wish, Mr. Reginald," Wilhelmina said, "that you could tell me what all this is about."

"It's the usual attempt," Mr. Reginald said, "the usual attempt of the richer classes to get the poorer into their power by hook or by crook."

"Oh, I've heard all that before," Wilhelmina answered. "But I do wish you could explain."

Mr. Reginald repeated:

"It's the usual attempt—the attempt of the richer classes——"

"No, no," Miss Macphail said, "you can't tell me that that good, gentle, little Mr. Fleight wants to get anybody into his power."

"He's only the instrument," Mr. Reginald said grimly.

"I thought you could have explained it better than that," Wilhelmina remarked with a sort of resignation. "You see my mother, she asks me so many questions. She comes straight from Germany, where things are quite different, and she hardly understands it at all. Of course, when I tell her that Mr. Fleight will get four hundred a year in Parliament she understands why Mr. Fleight himself is anxious to get in, because, of course, eight thousand marks seems a lot of money to a person from a small German village. But what she can't understand is why we're all helping him, and that's what I can't understand myself. Of course, I haven't told her that he's a Jew, because we think it a dreadful thing to be a Jew in Germany. And that makes it seem all the odder to me, too, so I thought you might be able to explain it for my sake if not for hers."

Mr. Reginald looked at her with a kindly expression on his lean and grizzled face.

" My dear," he said, " my dear Miss Wilhelmina, the explanation is just the same. This is the usual attempt of the richer classes to keep the poorer classes in their power. The appearance of the Jew in our society means that the Jew is an unrivalled soldier of fortune. He isn't part of our country ; he hasn't got our morality, but he's extraordinarily able as a ruler. So our side takes him up and uses him. It doesn't matter to him which side he's on, because he can't begin to understand our problems or our ethics or our morality or our way of looking at things."

" But I can't help saying," Miss Wilhelmina said, " that although Mr. Fleight is a Jew, it's impossible to believe you when you say that he's a wicked man. I don't believe he's capable of a mean action, and I don't believe he ever did anything wrong in his life."

Mr. Reginald suddenly quoted Flaubert at Miss Wilhelmina :

" ' And,' " he said, " ' since he was very strong, hardy, courageous and cunning in matters of war, he obtained very soon the command of a battalion.' "

Mr. Reginald nodded his head.

" It's perfectly true," he said, " I shouldn't in the least wonder if he isn't pretty soon leading us against the Sultan of Trebizond."

" I don't quite know what that means," Miss Wilhelmina said, " but I expect it means pretty well the same as what I mean."

## VII

MR. MACPHERSON had really the time of his life at Mr. Fleight's meeting. There is just no knowing—for he could never afterwards tell himself—how he got hold of the information about Mr. Fleight. It is probable that it came from the chauffeur, by whose side he sat to drive to the meeting. But it almost certainly began with the housemaid, for whom he had rung to tell her that, when she laid out his dress clothes, he liked to have a new tie and a clean shirt every evening. The girl must have given him some information, because the two policemen, drinking their beer in the servants' hall, had talked about their errands. And Mr. Macpherson probably got exact news from the chauffeur who, as a scientist in machines, had a clear and definite mind. Thus, from group to well-dressed group in the County Hall, before the speaker's arrival, Mr. Macpherson ran. It didn't matter whether he knew them or whether he didn't know them ; his speech always began :

" I say, you know, Mr. Rothweil's got into an extraordinary mess. Just listen to me——"

And, as Mr. Blood said afterwards, they couldn't grumble about Cluny. They had introduced him into their affairs with their eyes open, that he might spread the news. And if the news that he had now to spread wasn't exactly what suited them, that wasn't Cluny's fault.

Cluny himself wasn't actuated by the least grain of malice. He didn't see that the story, even if it were

put at its most discreditable for Mr. Fleight, really discredited him. It was just a matter of latitudes. In the slightly imbecile but very rich circle to which, in London, Mr. Macpherson was accustomed, the story that a woman had committed suicide on account of one's *beaux yeux* was a thing rather to make a hero of you. Life in those circles is a thing so dull and so dilettante that anything of a real nature, like a passion or a suicide, is a thing for which you should almost be congratulated in your private personality. As a public character you could almost be applauded because you gave people, whose sole interest was gossip, something real and vivid to talk about. That was why Cluny, with his endless digressions, was tolerated, welcomed, or even really beloved in innumerable drawing-rooms from Bayswater to Mayfair, and from Kensington to Mayfair again. For each of his digressions contained a story, and each story was a piece of gossip about someone known in those regions—a piece of gossip that you could repeat to eager ears. It was, however, a matter of latitude, and the Byefleet division in North Kent was geographically thirty miles to the east of Mayfair. You would have to put back the clock exactly a century to get at its public opinion. In that constituency, for instance, a married lady could not ask a young girl and her *fiancé* to spend a week-end together in her house. Bayswater would never even have heard of that convention.

The people amongst whom Mr. Macpherson found himself—the supporters of Mr. Rothweil's candidacy—came from mouldy old houses, like Corbury—old houses in hollows, old houses on the tops of downs, old houses surrounded by woods, and old houses that had British remains still standing in their walled gardens. They saw a person whom they took to be a maniac—

for Mr. Macpherson just spoke to them without any introduction, as he would have done at an evening party in Hans Place, S.W.

In what they designed as a final uprising against the forces which threatened to subvert the State, to deprive them of their diminished acres, to turn them out of their old houses, the County had had out its old carriages, had dressed its daughters in their finest finery of three years ago ; it had beaten up its sons, and sent them into the meetings on bicycles. It had given its clergyman a seat in the carriage where he would be crushed between the forms of two daughters with his knees pressing hard into the knees of a third daughter, crushed between her father and mother. It had set its butlers on the box-seat beside the coachman, so that they, too, at the back of the hall, might give the champion an enthusiastic greeting.

And it was to the daughters mostly of these people that, without introductions, but in a very high voice, Mr. Macpherson addressed himself. He was very short-sighted and, as he had had the misfortune to drop his glasses into the fish stews at Corbury, he really couldn't just tell what sort of people he was among. He saw only a great deal of pink and white material, and he couldn't see that the dresses were three years old at the newest. But he knew that the audience was the smart audience of the place, and he addressed them in terms that would have suited the members of smart audiences in Hyde Park Square. He couldn't even see the looks of disgust on people's faces, nor did he observe that elderly and stout mothers gathered their long trains round them as if they feared to be defiled.

And, since Mr. Macpherson concluded each retailing of the argument with the words :

" I'm an intimate friend of Mr. Rothweil, though he called himself Fleight till the other day, which was a stupid thing to do. So you can take it that what I am telling you is the exact truth." Since he concluded each narration of the anecdote with these words, he succeeded in making Mr. Rothweil fairly unanimously disliked by the women members of the great families of that neighbourhood. They were accustomed to carpet-baggers—indeed, mournfully, they would have acknowledged that of late years they had never been represented, on either side of the House, by anybody but a carpet-bagger because, with the exception of Mr. Blood, there was no local person rich enough to put up for the division. But a carpet-bagger so odious as Mr. Fleight appeared to be from his friend's anecdote, and a friend so odious as Mr. Macpherson they had never had to face. In an assembly that would have been brilliant three years ago, the word passed from lip to lip that Mr. Rothweil was a little horror.

There was some, but very decorous applause when the Earl of Ballyowen appeared as usual on the platform, and Mr. Fleight and Miss and Frau Macphail might be said to be included in the skirts of it. And there was hardly any applause at all, but mere astonishment when the Earl of Ballyowen, at the end of a stumbling speech, announced that, not Mr. Rothweil but Miss Macphail would address some words to the meeting.

Mr. Fleight thought suddenly that he had never seen anyone so beautiful as Miss Macphail. She leant slightly forward in her large, blonde beauty, and she suggested to him Britannia, suggested to him a mythical figure, some Victory that the Greeks had carved and coloured for the prow of a war galley. And, in this sudden arising of admiration, he caught his breath sharp and painfully,

since the whole of his being was already shaken with one painful emotion and another.

Miss Macphail, however, was dressed in the very newest dress that she had, a confection from the great Frankfurt House of Glogenau. It was made up of a smoke-grey satin so that it added to the enormousness of her figure. It was cut very tight in the lower part of the skirt and it had, which was the fashion of the moment, a little snaky tail by way of a train— a tail that the Earl of Ballyowen trod on when he walked behind her on to the platform. The whole of the corsage and the greater part of the skirt were covered with silver glass bugles alternating with hollow glass beads of the size of a pigeon's egg, so that when the Earl trod upon the dress it gave out reports resembling loud explosions, and these continued when anyone else, walking across the platform, trod upon the fragments of glass and bugles that the Earl's foot had detached from amongst the other ornaments. All this disgusted exceedingly the female part of the audience. And the female part of the audience made up at least two-thirds, half of the remainder being parsons. But what finally, as it slowly penetrated to their senses, filled them with absolute disgust was the fact that Augusta's dress was split up from the ankle to about the knee, and that she wore stockings of smoked-grey silk. Such a thing had never been heard of.

She spoke in a loud voice and with great volubility. She claimed their indulgence for the gentleman whom they all hoped to see representing them in Parliament. She said—and at this a disagreeable shiver ran through the hall—that he had lately, that he had only that day, received news of a most painful kind happening in circumstances that were perfectly rotten.

At this point Mrs. Lathbury, of Holmhunt, arose with

some rustling and with intent to leave the hall. Mrs. Lathbury was the leading member of the Church of England Temperance Society in that part of the world, and she was very Low Church in her sympathies, though actually she was somewhat stout. The clergyman who was sitting next to her begged her to resume her seat, for he knew that the stewards of the meeting had received private instructions from the agent to treat with great violence anyone who might be so much as mistaken for a suffragette.

The bereavement that Mr. Rothweil had suffered, Miss Macphail went on, was that of a humble and attached friend, and knowing as they did Mr. Rothweil's interest in the lower classes, they would realise that the very humility of that friend would render the bereavement all the more painful.

It was unfortunate that Miss Macphail dwelt upon the words "bereavement" and "painful" since in each instance she inverted the *b* and the *p*. It was unfortunate, also, that she pronounced the candidate's name correctly after the German fashion, since throughout the constituency he was known as Roth-Wheel. A supporter of the Government who had introduced himself into the back of the hall commented frequently on these peculiarities, and, since his voice was loud and raucous, Augusta suddenly lost her temper. She proclaimed that she was no more German than her interrupter, since she came of excellent Scottish family. This tickled the nerves of the interrupter and he exclaimed: "Ah, yes, London Scottish."

Augusta understood quite well that she was being called a Jewess, and this irritated her to a pitch of real rage, since nothing could have more revolted all that was German in her. She proclaimed loudly that what you

call others you are yourself, and that her interrupter must be a dirty Chew.

It was in all respects a most unfortunate meeting.

When Augusta sat down one single and deadly hiss drilled through the rather coarse applause that her appearance elicited from the servants from the end of the hall. This came from Mrs. Lathbury of Holmhunt. But there were many hisses when Mr. Rothweil concluded his discourse.

Academically considered Mr. Rothweil's speech was really excellent. Because he was in genuine tribulation, he imparted into it a note of the highest passion. And all his reading came to his aid. He spoke as the late Robert Louis Stevenson might have written, and his peroration, which was a peroration like those of the late W. E. Gladstone, contained some violent allusions to the vipers who were attempting to poison the life of their nation by spreading mephitic falsehoods against the private affairs of a person who, however humble, was attempting to arrest the nation in its disastrous plunge over the precipice of folly.

Unfortunately the audience was in no mood for that sort of thing. It felt, as far as the men were concerned, that the thing to do when you were in a scrape was, not to attempt to justify yourself, but to try to get your excellent family lawyer to buy you off. The women felt that it was disgusting to be in a scrape at all, but disgusting beyond belief to allude to it in any way. Thus when Mr. Rothweil sat down there was only Mr. Macpherson who applauded really rapturously. He considered the speech an extraordinarily fine performance, the sort of thing he would have wished to have done himself. Mr. Mitchell, who had recognised the influence of the late R L. Stevenson and the late W. E. Gladstone, applauded

only in an official manner. He despised the one and cordially disliked the other ornament of the Victorian age. Mr. Raggett, the sub-editor, followed the example of his chief. Miss Macphail applauded volubly from the platform, and her mother, nodding her portentous bonnet, followed her example. The Earl clapped together his hands, which were held high in the air as if for a signal to the better classes. His example was followed by almost no one in the body of the hall. And, although the lower classes at the back cheered rapturously a free fight broke out amongst those benches and the Earl, in the tumult, was unable to put the usual vote of thanks. His voice could not be heard.

In the journey back to Corbury, in Mr. Fleight's large, illuminated car, a remarkable *rapprochement* took place between Mr. Fleight and Miss Macphail. Miss Macphail was still in a tremendous rage at having been called a Jewess. She reported the repulsive occurrence to her mother, who broke out into torrents of horror. Frau Macphail, indeed, went through the motions of wiping out her mouth, so disgusting did she find the attribution of her daughter to that dispersed but triumphant race. And it fell to Mr. Fleight to console Augusta. He saw that he could quite understand how trying it must be for a person half Scotch, half German, to get called a Jew in public. It was never nice to be called a Jew; he himself never liked it, although he was proud enough of his ancestry.

On the other hand, Mr. Macpherson said he couldn't understand what Augusta's fuss was all about. He, Cluny himself, was an Armenian with a Scotch name; his mother was also a Circassian, and many people considered him to be a Jew. But what did it matter? He didn't care. The Jews were a hardy, courageous

and honourable race. He couldn't see why Augusta, who was, anyhow, by birth some sort of a foreigner, should object to promotion into a race with traditions so honourable. He tried to remind Augusta that, at any rate, the Jews had written the Bible, and he stated that he had known a man called Shimono Boski, who considered that his name was the most euphonious in the world. And, anyhow, the meeting had been a most tremendous success. That was why he had come in the car with them to congratulate Mr. Fleight upon his speech. He flattered himself that he had prepared the meeting to hear Mr. Fleight favourably, because he had told almost everybody in the hall all about the unfortunate things that had happened to Mr. Fleight himself.

It was at this point that Miss Macphail, whose mind worked very rapidly, exclaimed suddenly at the top of her voice that Macpherson was an idiot. Until that moment she had been imagining that her failure as a speaker was due almost entirely to her accent and to her manner, which might well strike such a stiff and glacial audience as being vulgar. And she had made up her mind to deliver several speeches to Mr. Blood's cousin, Mrs. Dumerque, in the hope that that lady would correct her when she appeared vulgar. With her German thoroughness Augusta was always perfectly ready to be instructed upon every possible point.

But Mr. Macpherson's admission let her see, with the quick certainty of a suspicious woman, that at least half the frigidity of her reception had been due to the gossiping propensities of Mr. Macpherson. She told him so.

She told him so in the most violent English and then, for further relief, she repeated it all in German. This

let loose the Frau Macphail who, giving free rein to her emotions expressed herself to the same effect but in an almost incomprehensible dialect, which she used when she was excited because, at the best of times, high German was almost a foreign language to her. Mr. Macpherson understood practically no German, but he realised that in various forms he was being called almost every possible sort of Jewish dog. This enraged him very much, so that he found it necessary to explain in a voice so high it tore all their ears, that he was an Armenian with a Scotch name and a Circassian mother. He explained also that Armenians are almost the same thing as Scottish Highlanders and that he had one more grudge to score off Augusta. One of these days he would tell everybody that her hair was dyed, and that would be an end of her.

The noise in the car was really considerable, and Mr. Fleight, though he had tried conscientiously to learn some Yiddish, had no German at all. Thus he could hardly understand what they were all talking about. Nevertheless, he had a pronounced sense of discomfort and of danger. He knew that in England it is almost impossible for any enterprise to keep together because there is so little sense of cohesion in this proud and formidable people that, at the outset of any communal enterprise, quarrels invariably arise and the enterprise itself comes miserably to the ground. And he took the fearful row that began in the motor car as the beginnings of such disruption amongst his own supporters. He did not know where it might not end.

Mr. Fleight, in spite of his upbringing, had the clan spirit very strongly developed. He considered himself far less a person to become, as it were, Prime Minister, than the advisory head of a predatory tribe. He had, to

use a cant phrase, "frozen on to" the small band containing Mitchell, Raggett, Macpherson, Augusta, Wilhelmina, and the contributors to his *Review*, and for the matter of that, to Frau Macphail; he had really identified himself with their interests as if they had formed a part of his family in a tent. He had done it from the moment Mr. Blood had started him off. And this was automatic in his nature; he couldn't have helped himself if he had wanted to. He would probably have preferred them to be Jews, and it had given him a certain satisfaction to cherish the error that Cluny Macpherson belonged to his own race. On the other hand he was, perhaps, glad that they weren't Jews because Jews always made him feel a little shy. His exclusively English upbringing had got him very much out of contact with their manners and their point of view, and the large saloons of Bayswater really rather frightened him, because, although he wished to approve of them, he couldn't help thinking that they displayed elements of bad taste. He was like a not very good Catholic who should have been brought up in an English cathedral city and should have been then asked to see the beauty in a chapel of the Spanish Jesuit type. There would be too much gilding; too many doves, cherubs, eagles, and gilt thunder-bolts. At the same time, Mr. Fleight's sympathies from a distance were very intense and very sincere. He had given at different times, nearly a quarter of a million sterling to one Jewish charity and another, and he had, anonymously, subscribed half the cost of producing an opera by a Jewish composer at Covent Garden.

And as regards his special band of *protégés* he felt, comfortingly, that if they didn't belong to the chosen people they belonged at least, to the hungry ones of the

earth; to the people who, with indifferent means, desired avidly great careers. They were the climbers, and it was his instinct to help them to climb and, languidly, to climb with them.

He went, therefore, with some perturbation to Mr. Blood at the moment of the car's arrival at Corbury.

Mr. Blood was sitting beneath a green reading lamp, attempting to compute with exactitude how many of the Ten Thousand had fallen before they reached the sea. Mr. Blood appeared keenly interested in Mr. Fleight's narration.

"Of course," he said, "as to the quarrel, that's nothing at all, but as to the other thing, it's probably serious. I'll tell you why."

He explained carefully and with patience that, if Mr. Fleight came to think of it, none of the people were English. Miss Macphail was half Scotch, half German; Frau Macphail was pure German, but, taking into account her place of origin, she was probably more than half Celtic. Mr. Macpherson was half Armenian, half Greek, though he preferred to call himself Circassian for purposes of romance. He, therefore, didn't see that Mr. Fleight need fear any falling out of a type so peculiarly English. These people just liked rows and recriminations, and they took them out when they were at leisure as the servants quarrel in the back offices of a Malay Sultan's reed palace.

"They won't cook the dinner or cut off the enemies' heads any less efficiently for that," Mr. Blood concluded. "And as for Mr. Macpherson, in spite of his having made a hash of your meeting, he's extraordinarily valuable. He's valuable not so much as a practical man but as a symptom. He's so exactly the Englishman of to-day."

"But," Mr. Fleight said, "he's half Armenian, and half sham Circassian."

"Well," Mr. Blood answered composedly, "doesn't that make him typically English? Just you think for a moment."

Mr. Fleight reflected for it could hardly be called a moment.

"I suppose," he said, "that what you mean is that to be a German to-day is to be something; and to be a Jew is to be something; and to be a Southern or a Northern Frenchman is to be something. But to be a Londoner or a Parisian, or let's say, to come from Berlin, is to be just nothing at all—a product of restaurants and the bucket shops."

Mr. Blood said ironically:

"You're getting on. You're really getting on."

"And if," Mr. Fleight continued seriously, "you're a Londoner—a cosmopolitan—and come from some place where there are real people, like North Germany or South Germany or North France or South France, it will really handicap you for a Londoner because you'll still retain characteristics that will hamper you. But if you come as a sort of hybrid from a couple of races, that don't matter, like Greeks and Armenians, or any sort of Central American republic, you'll just be chattering enough and imbecile enough and romantic enough and sufficiently utterly useless to be the typical Englishman of to-day, because the Londoner is the Englishman, whatever they may say north of the Humber."

"And that," Mr. Blood confirmed him amiably, "is why this country is rotting away."

"Of course," Mr. Fleight differed from him, "that's why I find this country so comfortable to live in."

"You mean," Mr. Blood said, "that you'd rather

rule over a population of gentle imbeciles like Cluny Macpherson than over a set of brutes like myself."

"I suppose that's what I really do mean," Mr. Fleight said reflectively. "That's certainly what I do mean."

"Well, you can do it, my friend," Mr. Blood said. "I'm not hindering you. Inscrutable and august Providence can have its own fun for all I care."

He pressed the electric bell that was upon the desk, and told Lennards to beg Mr. Macpherson to come down and speak to him if he wasn't tired. There was an important piece of news for him.

"I rather gather," he said to Mr. Fleight, when the butler had gone, "that your candidature is in a bad way."

"I rather guess it is," Mr. Fleight said. "It was a most disastrous meeting, anyhow."

"Well," Mr. Blood answered, "the piece of news that you'll hear in a minute may change the aspect of things. I'll tell you how I know it. Mrs. Dumerque's second cousin married Captain Hemsterley, who's the brother-in-law and heir, through his wife, of Mr. Gregory, your rival, the Government candidate. You'll see how that bears in a minute. You remember that Hemsterley is Gregory's heir."

"Gregory seems to be an unhappy sort of person," Mr. Fleight said. "I shook hands with him in front of the Town Hall yesterday. His hand felt more like a piece of wet cheese than anything I've ever felt. And he'd a most beastly cough. He couldn't speak for it. They oughtn't to have had him out in that rain."

Mr. Macpherson entered quite vividly. He was wearing an emerald green satin dressing gown with bright scarlet revers and cuffs, and, when this garment parted it displayed pink silk pyjamas. Upon his feet

he had Turkish slippers of scarlet morocco and upon his head a scarlet fez with a purple tassel. He thus resembled exactly one of the calenders out of the Arabian Nights, and in his arms gently and carefully he carried a brindled kitten that bit at his delicate fingers.

" You perceive," Mr. Blood said to Mr. Fleight, " the typical Englishman."

" Well, I hope," Mr. Macpherson said, " that I'm English enough," and then he added, " This is a most interesting kitten. The mother of the man the housemaid had it from lived with——"

" Now, listen to me," Mr. Blood said, " you've been trotting round spreading the news. Now you trot round and spread some more."

Mr. Macpherson's amiable oriental face fell for a moment into an expression of contriteness.

" I say," he exclaimed, " I hope I haven't done any harm; I wouldn't for worlds have done any harm."

" Oh, that's all right." Mr. Fleight took the words that he had just heard from Mr. Blood and repeated them. " You've only been a day in front of the fair. It will all be in the newspapers the day after to-morrow. You've probably broken the shock."

Mr. Macpherson heaved a sigh of genuine relief, and the kitten crawled out of his arms to sit upon his shoulder and bite the black tassel of his fez. As the tassel dropped over Mr. Macpherson's ear, the kitten bit the lobe also, but, although this hurt him quite considerably, he was too amiable to interfere with the little animal's pleasure.

" Now just listen," Mr. Blood said, " listen carefully." He paused and then said, " Captain Hemsterley, the brother-in-law of Mr. Fleight's opponent, who is also his heir through his wife, has filed a petition in lunacy

against the candidate. The Hemsterleys are enraged at his spending so much money to get into Parliament. They've let him alone hitherto, when it was only a matter of a cold in the head, because the doctors have said he can't possibly live a year. But they want to stop his wasting money on the party funds, and so the summons to appear before the commissioners on lunacy was served on him only the day before yesterday."

A great joy lit up the features of Mr. Macpherson, and he turned to rush from the room.

"Wait a minute," Mr. Blood said. "Before you wake everybody in the house in order to tell them, you had better hear some of the aspects of the case. In the first place it's an absolutely infamous proceeding. Mr. Gregory is weak and ill, but he's no more insane than you are and certainly not half as insane as I."

"Then he won't be declared a lunatic," Mr. Macpherson exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, he will," Mr. Blood answered, "at least he'll be declared incapable of managing his own affairs. You see he breeds bull terriers."

"But, great heavens!" Mr. Macpherson exclaimed, "anybody can breed anything. I knew a man who bred Angola bats. His name was Child, and his sister——"

"But the point is," Mr. Blood said, "that poor Mr. Gregory has odd ideas about bull terriers. He thinks that a bull terrier ought to be a cross between a terrier and a bull-dog. So he's spent many thousand pounds on purchasing bull-dog sires and champion terrier mothers."

"But, great heavens!" Mr. Macpherson said.

"The point is," Mr. Blood interrupted him again, "that the Hemsterleys have got bull terrier experts

to swear that bull terriers can't be produced by that crossing. They're probably lying. I don't know. Then, for instance, Mr. Gregory is interested in pigs. He has the theory that pork is not sufficiently eaten in England. Every continental doctor would back him up in that. But the Hemsterleys have got several doctors to swear that pork is highly dangerous food. Gregory has spent a good deal of money on patent portable sties. He thinks that by moving pigs about in grass land they can be made more healthy."

"That seems sound enough," Mr. Fleight exclaimed.

"Ah, but you see," Mr. Blood continued, "there was once an unfortunate incident. Mr. Gregory was very ill with influenza and at the same time he was very impatient to see a new kind of portable sty. So he had a sty brought into his drawing-room through the French windows with a pig in it. While he was looking at the pig he fainted, and he had to be carried away to bed and there he remained for a fortnight. And since there was no one to look after the servants, the pigsty remained in the drawing-room. So now the Hemsterleys have got half the population of poor Gregory's place to swear that he was in the habit of keeping pigs in his drawing-room."

"But can't he explain?" Mr. Fleight said. "Can't he make it clear that that sort of thing was an accident?"

"You can't ever explain that sort of thing to commissioners and masters and clerks and people in lunacy," Mr. Blood answered, "they're blind and deaf and paralytic, and their underlings want as many jobs as possible. And they never hear what anybody says, and if they do, they can't see who it is saying it. No, my dear Fleight, once you get into their clutches you never get out. And all their proceedings take place in secret so

that it's contempt of court to refer to them in the Press, and the minister who found them their jobs won't let them be referred to in Parliament. It's a wonderful system——"

"By heavens!" Mr. Fleight suddenly broke in, "I won't let that man be shut up if I have to spend half the money I've got. I'll have him properly protected."

"Well, that's very creditable of you," Mr. Blood said; "it's quite admirable and it would make a very pretty spectacle." He turned towards Mr. Macpherson. "I think you can go and rouse the house now," he said. "And remember the pretty story how one candidate is writted for lunacy and the other swears that he'll rescue him from his dungeon, if he has to raise a troop of artillery to do it."

And whilst the skirts of Mr. Macpherson's dressing gown were whisking round the corner of the door, Mr. Fleight said:

"I'm really quite in earnest, you know. I mean that if they do try to bring that man in a lunatic . . ."

"I know you're perfectly in earnest," Mr. Blood answered, "and it's a most commendable resolution."

"Unless," Mr. Fleight said, with a sudden loyalty, "it would interfere with your plans."

"Oh, it wouldn't interfere with my plans," Mr. Blood answered, "unless you spent too much money. You've got to remember that you're not really a Rockefeller, and that it generally costs you a pretty penny when you attack ancient and corrupt institutions. But you'd better sit down, I've got something to say to you."

Mr. Fleight sat down in the great chair that had the two lions quarrelling over the top of the back. A dead silence reigned. But after a time Mr. Fleight remarked meditatively:

" You don't seem to object to these corrupt institutions. You seem rather to like them. I can't understand that."

" I don't, you know, care a halfpenny," Mr. Blood answered, " but if I did have any preferences I should say that it's more picturesque and better for everybody concerned that there should be secret courts presided over by blind, deaf and obstinate old men than that the country should be run by imbecile and corrupt millionaires. If you look at it in a perfectly aloof manner you'll see that it's scandalous that one party machine should job you into this candidature and that the other should job Gregory. If you look at it from the point of view of the unfortunate constituency it's got to be represented either by a chap with, on the face of it, an extraordinarily bad record with women—that's you—or else its member has to be a soft-witted creature with a cold in the head, who keeps pigs in his drawing-room."

" But he didn't," Mr. Fleight said indignantly.

" Oh, yes, he did," Mr. Blood answered; " the facts were exactly as I have related them. And if a man is so weakly that, for a fortnight, he can't keep pigs out of his drawing-room, he isn't the man to represent a decorous and rather puritanic constituency like Byefleet. You know perfectly well that the constituency detests both of you."

Mr. Fleight, after a moment of reflection, sighed deeply.

" Of course every word of what you've been saying is perfectly true," he exclaimed, " but it seems a dismal sort of business."

" It is a dismal sort of business," Mr. Blood said. " That's what I've been saying ever since I was born,

and from the point of view of a man who cares for decencies—which I don't give a hang for—it gets more and more dismal every day. The old sort of corruption, that of jobbing decayed barristers into shops, was a child compared with it; was a joke. Of course, you must have corruption. As long as there's a nephew in the world there must be nepotism. You can't hit it because you can't really define it. You gave a large cheque to a fellow called Garstein, but it was made payable to 'self.' And on account of that cheque you're going to represent Byefleet, which doesn't want you. But you couldn't possibly prove that you gave that cheque to an American Jew. It was cashed, as you know, by a boy messenger. There's just simply nothing whatever to show for the immense mass of efficient corruption that hangs like a pall all over this country, and all over every other country for the matter of that. The old sort of corruption was picturesque, so that you could have a shy at it. But you couldn't ever catch Mr. Garstein. He'd be off to Saratoga for his health before you'd opened your mouth, and every paper of both sides would be shockedly exclaiming that you were too scandalous to be printed. The other man is just the same. The story of Gregory is just as preposterous as your own——"

Mr. Blood broke off, and then he exclaimed suddenly:

"Look here, I'm going to let you Corbury."

"Let me Corbury!" Mr. Fleight exclaimed. "Good God! You aren't in want of money."

"I'm not in want of money," Mr. Blood answered; "but you need to be an English county gentleman."

"But I'm not fitted for it," Mr. Fleight expostulated. "I should look ridiculous. Fancy, Rothweil of Corbury!"

"Rothweil's a very good name," Mr. Blood answered,

" and don't make any mistakes. I'll tell you what the position is: I don't think you've got a chance—not a ghost of a chance—against Gregory."

" I don't think I have," Mr. Fleight answered. " It's all up with me."

" Then what will happen," Mr. Blood said, " is that poor Mr. Gregory will be unseated about six months after he's elected, because he'll be proved to be of unsound mind. He'll probably be forced to resign, because, if he didn't, your side would get him kicked out, or they'd have a try, and there'd be a scandal, which neither side in this country ever wants. Now, the opponent that you're going to have after poor Gregory goes is my brother Reginald."

" I rather suspected that, you know," Mr. Fleight said.

" So you would," Mr. Blood answered. He continued, after a moment: " The position then will be perfectly regular. You will be a Jew with a bad record about women."

" I haven't really got a bad record about women," Mr. Fleight said.

" I know you haven't," Mr. Blood answered; " but you'll never shake free of it—never in your life. And it'll do you good in the end—after the first year or so—because it will add a touch of romance to your figure; there's nothing else in the world that's romantic about you."

" That's perfectly true, too," Mr. Fleight said.

" Well, now we've got a tremendous lot to talk about," Mr. Blood began once more. " Take off your coat and put your feet upon the table and make yourself perfectly comfortable, and don't interrupt unless I ask you a question or unless you're too absolutely outraged in your best feelings."

"I think I'll sit as I am," Mr. Fleight said; "it seems more respectful. You see, this is almost the greatest day of my life. It's what I've been looking forward to ever since I sat in old Plodge's room and listened to you speaking three solid hours to him and other fellows with never a word to me. I said to myself that the ambition of my life would be to be asked down to Corbury and have you talking by the hour to me alone."

"Then here you are," Mr. Blood said, "and I'm sure your flattery does me good."

## VIII

THE position, as Mr. Blood propounded it in the darkened library, beneath the painted circles on the ceiling, was pretty well as follows: Mr. Fleight might consider himself to have lost the first battle of his campaign. He had better go on canvassing and spreading bribes in view of the next bye-election. But he hadn't the beginnings of a chance of coming in on top of the poll. He just simply wouldn't be anywhere after the papers reported his evidence in the two courts next day. Nobody could stand up against that, and he had better let the constituency alone for a couple of months.

He must regard his career as divided into two parts. There was the constituency which he must render safe, and there was London which would make or mar him afterwards. For a moment he must give up the constituency. He must set to work and slave like a nigger to make the big entertainment that they were giving, and that would fall just before the declaration of the poll, as enormous a success as he possibly could and as vulgar a one. In that he was appealing to the suffrages of the people who would " shove " him after he got into Parliament. After that he must take Corbury furnished for a season and begin, tentatively, once more to show his nose in the division. As Mr. Blood had already said, he would be a Jew with a bad record about women. Reginald, on the other hand, was a Papist with a bad record in the Divorce Courts. They would be so evenly matched that scandal would have to die down.

"Now you understand," Mr. Blood addressed Mr. Fleight, "I'm going to give Reginald the most perfectly decent show it's possible for him to have. He's my brother and I've a great affection for him, so you mustn't mind."

Mr. Fleight made with his right hand a little gesture that showed he quite understood.

"I want Reginald to make a career," Mr. Blood said. "It's about the one thing I do want, and he's made a start. The position is perfectly even and fair. I doubt if any other constituency would give him a start or you a start just now. So you'll be helping each other really, because, whichever of you fails, he will put up such a fine fight that another seat will certainly be found for him at the General Election, when there's so much buzz that scandal doesn't count much. You understand?" Again Mr. Fleight moved his right hand.

"What I'm going to do," Mr. Blood said, "is to go to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and tell him exactly what I'm up to. And I warn you, Reginald will spend money like water. I'm as rich as you—and really richer—because I've not got your ambitions. I know you don't care about money, but it's going to cost you a pretty penny. I shan't, myself, take personal sides in any case. That's why I'll let you Corbury. You can have it for threepence a week if you like, or if you like you can pay three thousand a year to Reginald. I don't care one way or the other. You may think that Reginald ought to have Corbury, but I don't agree. It isn't fitting that a younger son should have the family house while the owner is alive. And whatever may be said about Reginald, he's the younger son. He'll have to turn out and live with Lennards in quite a good house, that's the family dower-place. That's enough of that. Now let's

get on to the woman question. You must marry. Do you understand? You've got to marry quick and strong."

Mr. Blood looked keenly at his guest. He was expecting an outburst of protest such as had greeted him when he had first mentioned the subject. Instead, Mr. Fleight just brought out: "Well?" so inaudibly that it appeared to be a mumble. Under Mr. Blood's eyes a flush suddenly came out upon his cheeks, rose to his temples and suffused his whole face. He had a little aspect of the deepest shyness. Mr. Blood continued to look at him until he dropped his eyes.

"Of course," Mr. Blood said at last, "that makes it infinitely easier." And then he added: "I may take it, for the sake of clearness, that you have now no objection to marriage. Something has altered your point of view so that you are no longer concerned as enormously for the Baroness of Palatial Hall, and that even the tragic fate of Miss Leroy does not bulk as hugely in your emotions?"

Mr. Blood paused, observing the various hues that chased each other across Mr. Fleight's face. Then he began again:

"As there's a great deal to be said, perhaps we may as well leave out the expression of your creditable emotions. That they will be creditable I am absolutely certain, for you're altogether the most creditable person I've ever come across. Besides, you don't seem in the least inclined to express yourself."

"You said, you know," Mr. Fleight remarked mildly, "that I was to hold my tongue and let you do the talking. That's what I'm trying to do."

"Oh, I see!" Mr. Blood exclaimed. "I didn't expect you to be so well drilled. People never are well drilled.

But, anyhow, you've done with women for the rest of your days. This closes the chapter with a bang."

Mr. Fleight writhed in his chair.

"Oh, but I haven't!" he said. "I don't want to interrupt, but I can't really stand that."

"Oh, but you have!" Mr. Blood answered; "done with them for good and all. You're going to become a thoroughly domesticated character; you're going to settle down and enjoy the pleasures of a Christian fireside."

Mr. Fleight had exhibited a very marked perturbation during the beginning of this speech, but towards the end a measure of calmness descended upon him.

"Of course," he said, "if having done with women means domesticity and a Christian fireside——"

"What the devil else should it mean?" Mr. Blood paused again to collect his ideas and then once more he said:

"The whole of this chapter of your existence has been muddled up with the silliest sort of folly about women. There's the Baroness of Palatial Hall. She's vulgar, hard, commercial, and she has really a sort of vinegarish, spinsterly jealousy. She's the very worst kind of Englishwoman, but I suppose you'll keep your engagements to her. She's worried the life out of you and she's done nothing for you. Then again there's the Gilda Leroy affair; that's exactly the sort of grotesque nonsense that a little chap like you is bound to get entangled in. There's not a single newly-rich person of your type in London who isn't being blackmailed and made utterly miserable by some such preposterous member of the lower classes. I don't mean to say that Miss Leroy wasn't a perfectly well-meaning young woman. But she's done your business just as effectually as if

she'd been the worst harpy in West Kensington. You're predestinated for that sort of thing; and, with a chap like you, you'll get blackmailed by innocent people infinitely worse than you will be by bad hats, because you're such an innocent little chap that you haven't really any taste for bad people or even for dissipated people. You don't let them come near you. Even the Baroness—she's told me so and I know it's true—is as viciously respectable by temperament as the very worst type of provincial Sunday school teacher above the age of fifty. She's all that temperament; and as far as I can see, you've got her hung on to your miserable tail for the rest of your miserable life."

Again Mr. Fleight writhed.

"Now, don't be unhappy," Mr. Blood continued. "I undertook to fix it all up for you and I've fixed it all up. I've seen the Baroness amongst what Cluny calls her porphyry fonts, and it's all fixed up. You're at liberty to be happy with any houri that you like to select. But mind—you've got to marry her! The houri, not the Baroness! I'm not officially a moral man, but I've a good deal of common sense, which your ancestor knew to be the same thing—Moses, the law-giver of Israel."

Again Mr. Fleight flushed.

"How did you know," he said, "that Moses was my ancestor?—that I was of the tribe of Moses, that is to say?"

"Oh, don't I know," Mr. Blood said, "that your respected father, Mr. Aaron Rothweil, had some things wrapped up in a lot of old rags that he carried about in his bosom even when he was starving—things like the bone tabs that you hang on key-rings? Do you suppose I don't know that you trace your pedigree back to three thousand—or seven thousand or whatever it was—

years before the Christian era? You might give me credit for knowing what every schoolboy knows about your amiable, but much too sentimental race. If you weren't a prince in Israel, what the devil could you be, I should like to know? Haven't you got a sort of antelope look about you? Like a confounded mournful gazelle. One could break one of your knees as if they were pipe stems. Well, that's blood."

Mr. Fleight had not been listening very intently. The sort of theory that Mr. Blood had been uttering was too familiar to arrest his attention, and instead of an answer he brought out a deep groan.

"I don't believe," he said, "that she'd marry me. Of course, I want to marry her. Or at least I don't so much want to marry her as to lay pearls as big as roc's eggs at her feet and have myself so efficiently cremated that there'd only be a teaspoonful of ashes she could drink in a golden cup of wine."

"Of course, my oriental friend," Mr. Blood said, "that is how it would take you. Mind, I don't mean to say that I can guarantee this particular houri's marrying you. I can't, but I'll guarantee that as far as the Baroness is concerned you'll be at liberty to pay your honourable addresses to any blonde young person that you like to think of."

"You don't think she'll have me?" Mr. Fleight began agitatedly.

"I can't tell," Mr. Blood answered. "I can't guarantee any of these things. If you like to empower me, as a respectable marriage broker, to make your Israelitish advances I'll do my best and no doubt I could do it twenty times better than ever you could; but I can't guarantee that."

"Then what's the good," Mr. Fleight said, "of any-

thing you can guarantee? I don't want to be ungrateful, but what *is* the good?"

"My good man," Mr. Blood answered coolly, "I can clear up my lord's temporal affairs; for the matter of that I could knock down any two or three men who tried to strike him. But when it comes to providing love philtres for a person of my lord's physical appearance—which in the large Teutonic eye couldn't be expected to be attractive—well, frankly, that isn't my job."

Mr. Fleight sank down in the deep chair so low that he almost disappeared. An entirely new degree of dejection expressed itself upon his face, and Mr. Blood was so moved by his obvious suffering that he said:

"Of course, I could use my common sense to present your material advantages to the sterling Saxon common sense of the lady."

"Oh, yes, for heaven's sake do that!" Mr. Fleight exclaimed, and he sprang out of his chair.

"If you'll only do that——" he began again, but Mr. Blood interrupted him.

"Of course I'll do that," he answered; "but if you want to give me any help you'll just clear out of the way as much as possible. You won't present yourself to the lady's gaze more often than a hundred times a day."

Mr. Fleight passed agitatedly twice up and down in front of the high carved mantel.

"I can't," he exclaimed, "keep away from her! I don't seem to be living. At this moment I don't seem to be living. You see, for a week, for a month she's hardly been out of my sight. I've got so used—but there, I don't know how long it's been. It's been like the dawn of life to me—a beginning of life! I haven't lived.

Don't you understand? But, there, you can't understand; you cold-blooded Christian product. You're all like fishes."

"My good man," Mr. Blood said coolly, "I understand, though I don't burst all the pearl studs out of my shirt front in the effort to explain. Look here, I'll make you a level bet—if I don't in the end make myself ten times as much of a confounded fool over some such little imbecile as Wilhelmina, I'll make you a present of Corbury, lock, stock and barrel. Of course, I hope I shall stick out for ten years, or if God has any goodness in Him at all, for twenty. I'm a temperate sort of person, but it will come."

Mr. Fleight exclaimed, with a disconcerting fury:

"Who the devil cares about you and Wilhelmina? You aren't a human being, you're a natural force. You're like a wind or a rock or a chain of mountains. You stick up there and you say '*Bow wow! I am because I am.*' But I'm a man, damn you, with the passion of a man and the heart of a man. But no," he added, and an air of profound dejection settled once more upon him. He threw himself into the depths of the big chair again. "I'm not a man. I'm not even a dirty little antelope, as you said. I'm one of the cage of apes that came from Sidon and made the Queen of Sheba feel ill. That's what I am."

"Well, it's very satisfactory," Mr. Blood said.

"It isn't, damn you, it isn't!" Mr. Fleight answered. "It's damnable! That woman would marry you—a great, ugly, rough monster of a thing like you!"

"Well, I daresay she would," Mr. Blood said complacently, "but then I'm rather impressive. What you've to do, is to assure her of the sterling merits of your character. Or rather with the idea that you're

going to get on. What she despises you for is that she thinks you such an arrant duffer."

Mr. Fleight suddenly sat up.

"I say," he brought out, "I've been frightfully disrespectful, but you won't mind; you understand how it is."

"Oh, I quite understand," Mr. Blood said, "that when you get really shaken up, the black pride that's at the bottom of you comes up, and the blood of Moses and Sennacherib. Because, although you mayn't know it, a grand-daughter of Sennacherib was your ninety-fifth grandmother. So that you speak to me as if you were Saul the bad-tempered addressing a Numidian slave."

"Did I really speak to you like that?" said Mr. Fleight, with something like awe in his tone. "Isn't it terrible the way it takes one?"

"There's a little sentence," Mr. Blood said, "that I'll just read you so that you may understand how I take it. It's this:" He went to one of the bookshelves in the far dark corner of the room. He pulled down a book and, after a moment, he read from the shadows; for his eyes were extraordinarily keen, and he liked to show off his power:

"'*I am glad that my hero showed himself not too reasonable at that moment, for any man of sense will always come back to reason in time; but, if love does not gain the upper hand in a boy's heart at such an exceptional moment, when will it?*' That's how I look at you. That's written by a Russian."

"Those Russians!" Mr. Fleight exclaimed, in a tone of deep disgust. "This disgusting world! Look here, do you suppose, if I gave her my Norfolk Rembrandt? . . ."

"Now, there's enough of this," Mr. Blood said, and

coming over to his desk he took up a pamphlet that, in lettering of silver and black upon a violet cover, displayed the words "*Monumental Architecture.*" "What you've got to think of is a tombstone for Gilda Leroy, and what I should advise you to do is to take this book with you to the inquest to-morrow and let Mrs. Leroy choose from it the most expensive tomb she can possibly long for. Here's, for instance, Style 1. A marble Latin cross with finely carved lilies in relief; it comes to £18. Or there's a marble sculptured angel, or a real marble anchor that they stick down on the turf. Or here's a marble and granite spiral monument, eighteen feet high. But what I'm pretty certain Mrs. Leroy will really prefer, is some sort of marble angel. Anyhow, you remember to console Mrs. Leroy. And if you give her a ninety-two pound necropolis funeral with walking mutes, and a monument that she can take half Westminster to see every Sunday of the year, you'll make Mrs. Leroy feel that, if it isn't a good thing that her daughter's dead, at least, it might have been very much worse if she'd lived. For Mrs. Leroy is a sensible woman."

"It's extraordinary," Mr. Fleight said, "how you know things! That is precisely how it will strike Mrs. Leroy."

"And how the devil should it strike any other sensible person?" Mr. Blood said. "That girl was too sensitive to live. So it's a great deal better she's dead; and a funeral like that will be fame and glory to Mrs. Leroy, and something she can remember with pleasure for the rest of her life. She couldn't possibly ever have remembered her daughter in anything but the way a hen remembers a nightingale after it's hatched it. That's the fortune of war."

Mr. Fleight sighed.

"The fortune of war," he answered. And then he added, "But I can't blame myself, and I'm not going to blame myself."

"You'll get all the blame you need when the papers with the report of the inquest come along," Mr. Blood said. "Wait till the counsel who defends the hooligans gets on your track."

"Well, I can stand that," Mr. Fleight answered.

"You'll jolly well have to," was Mr. Blood's comment, and then proceeded, "Now let's get to the remainder of the business. What I've arranged with the Baroness is that you're to give her Palatial Hall, and to pay its bills for her and to give her £3,500 a year for pin-money. And you're to give her about half your spare time."

"I can't do that," Mr. Fleight said decidedly. "It would be immoral."

"It's all really fixed up for you," Mr. Blood said reasonably. "You've just got to do what I tell you or have nothing more to do with me. Look here; you're a polygamist. It's in your race as a Jew, and it's in the English race owing to the circumstances of the times. Now, you must have an official wife, as I have told you before—someone blonde and large and showy, because all the other Jews in London would despise you if you married a Jewess. And if the other Jews of London don't back you, you wouldn't have any more chance than a Christian. It's positively necessary for a Jew to have a Nazarene captive of his bow and spear. As I've said before, you can't go on living at Palatial Hall for a day longer. It's too like the restaurant buildings of an exhibition. While you're a bachelor you'd better take a little furnished house in Curzon Street. When you're married you'll have to have a mansion in

one of the big squares—Eaton Square, Cadogan Square, it doesn't much matter which. As for the Baroness, she'll keep you out of mischief. The sort of career you're going in for is amazingly apt to get a man like you into some sort of scandalous position. It's the late hours and perpetual nervous excitement that do it."

"But I want to give up the career," Mr. Fleight said. "I want what you call the Christian fireside."

"Then," Mr. Blood answered, "the woman that you want to marry won't marry you. What she wants is a career, and if you can't give her that, nothing in the world that you can give her will attract her. The woman you want to marry has spirit enough to be jealous, and common sense enough not to make public rows. Or if you can't marry her——"

"If I can't marry her," Mr. Fleight interrupted, "I shall cut my throat."

"If you can't marry her," Mr. Blood continued equably, "any woman that I let you marry will be of that type. Then you'll be in the really ideal position. You see, every blessed member of every cabinet there's been for the last fifty years has always been in danger of terrific scandals because they behave like wild asses when they get a holiday. They can't help it, the work is so frightfully hard. You won't be in that danger, and that will be a tremendous advantage for an artistic, nervous sort of chap like you. You see, the two women you'll have tacked to your tail—the one perpetually prodding you up and the other perpetually nagging you to death—will so exhaust you with feminine society that you'll be out of danger altogether."

"But it's a cynically and scandalously immoral position," Mr. Fleight expostulated. "It's the most scandalous proposition I've ever heard made."

"It's the position you'll have to take up," Mr. Blood said grimly, "if you're ever going to marry the woman you want to marry."

"But my future wife——" Mr. Fleight began.

"Mrs.—afterwards Lady—Rothweil will kick up no end of a racket about it," Mr. Blood said calmly, "but she'll like it to continue just the same. She's got too much common sense to want anything else. She'll like making a row, too. That's what women are. She'll have a first-class grievance to talk about when your conversation slackens, and that's always a good thing for a young married couple, because it gives them something to talk about. The real strain in married life comes when the husband goes nearly crazy over trying to find things to talk about to his wife, and the wife goes nearly crazy over trying to find things to talk about to her husband. That's what you'll be protected from. Lady Rothweil will always have the Baroness for a topic and the Baroness will always have Lady Rothweil, and between them you'll be the most miserable man in London. But you'll be extraordinarily free of entanglements. You won't have any time for them, and Lady Rothweil will know it, and the Baroness will know it, and they'll be perfectly happy."

"But I couldn't bear to think of giving that glorious creature one moment's uneasiness."

"Of course you couldn't," Mr. Blood answered; "that's what's expected of you."

"I think when I see her——" Mr. Fleight was beginning.

"I don't in the least care what you think when you see her," Mr. Blood said. "What you've got to get into your head at this moment is that you must stop making your Haroun al Raschid visits amongst the

lower classes. That's the most dangerous thing you can possibly do."

"I don't see that," Mr. Fleight answered.

"Well, listen to me," Mr. Blood said, "and I'll deliver a lecture to you—on the lower classes."

He paused to draw a deep breath and then, leaning forward in his chair beside his large desk, he fixed Mr. Fleight with his eyes, and began:

"Now I'm going to tell you the absolute truth about Society as it is, and the life we lead. The society we live in is an extraordinarily cruel and disordered machine. It is like a quantity of huge metal discs whirling round and running the one upon the other. In this society your business is not to love the classes below you or to sympathise with them, or to seek to help them; your business is to seek to crush and to extract the last drop of blood from their mangled bodies, the last drop of sweat from their dripping brows. That is the meaning of the word democracy as we understand it to-day. It is better, because it is more scientifically honest to look at the matter in that way. You must regard yourself as a member of the governing classes just as you regard yourself as a Jew. You are as distinct from them as you are from any Gentile race. They are the material to be exploited; you are the exploiter. There is no other way of looking at it.

"I was talking the other day to Sir Benjamin Blind—it's some years ago now. You remember that labour was utterly smashed. They'd tried every possible kind of violent strike, and they'd failed, and there wasn't a penny in the trades union coffers. Not any! They were done.

"And I met Sir Benjamin Blind—the chap who was financing the Government at the time—and I was very

angry. Yes, I was really quite angry. So I reviewed the position for him. I said that this was the pretty pass to which a century of Whig democracy had brought our working people—they were grovelling before that obscene Eastern figure, who had been pulling the Whig strings for the last twenty years. I told him that with their Education Bill they had softened the working men until not only they couldn't fight, as their uneducated fathers had fought, the battles of labour, but until they couldn't even produce leaders. I told him that the old type of labour leader was a man with a dirty beard and a loud voice, who could command his followers to break spindle frames and to blow up forges. The present type of labour leader was an M.A.—a fellow who'd gone up through the Board Schools and looked like a Non-conformist parson—a man who so well understood the problems of labour that just before declaring, say, a coal strike, he would buy fifty thousand tons of coal and hold it for the rise whilst his men starved with their educated bellies. I told him that that was what Whig education had done for the working man. And then I went on to Whig legislation. I pointed out with great amiability that the Whig system of doles prevented the revolutions that the Whigs were so much afraid of. Well, I summed it up in the words of a rivetter that I happened to meet when I was looking over a workhouse near Middlesburgh. The man was commenting on the Government of the day. He said:

"'This here blooming Government come in as the working man's friend! If they hadn't a come in we'd have jolly well smashed up everything. Before they come in they promised us six hundred a year per man. And what have they given us? What have they given us? Seven and sixpence a week when we're ill and

can't tell whether the beer's good or bad, and ten shillings a week when we're in the blooming grave—for who of us chaps is going to live to be seventy ? '

" That's the Whig trick.

" So I began to get angry because of the way Sir Benjamin Blind grinned, and because of the fatness of his stomach. And I said that his dirty crew had pulled the strings of that machine. They were all employers of labour. And Sir Benjamin winked an obscene eye and remarked: ' What do *you* think ? ' I won't trouble you with what I remarked to Sir Benjamin after that."

Mr. Blood paused for a moment and took a deep breath. He stretched out a hand towards Mr. Fleight.

" Now, look here, sonny," he said, " you be a decent, straight sort of man. I don't like to see you going into the homes of the poor and pretending to yourself that you're looking out for a way to better their conditions. You're an employer of labour, and it looks too much like spying out an enemy's country. It looks a dirty trick, and I don't like seeing you do it. You keep clear in your mind the fact that what you've got to do—that your function in society—is to grind the working class down. If you give your working men better cottages you realise perfectly straight in your mind that what you're doing is making him contented with a kitchen dresser when, if the poor devil had any sense, he'd see that his only chance in life would be to be so discontented that he'd never stop until he had looted Palatial Hall."

" I don't believe," Mr. Fleight said, " that you're talking at all cynically now. I believe you're perfectly in earnest."

" I'm absolutely in earnest," Mr. Blood answered. " I like the working man—well, I like men, and I like to

see a clear and straight fight. I'd like to see the working man looting Palatial Hall, because it's what God would let him do if God weren't asleep above this miserable country."

"It sounds very barbaric," Mr. Fleight said. "It's not at all the sort of thing I like."

"Well," Mr. Blood answered, "I'm not asking you to do anything about it—or anything to bring about the sacking of Palatial Hall, for the matter of that. I don't object to crime, and I don't object to robbery, and I don't even object to sanctimoniousness or to hypocrisy. But I like a hypocrite to know that he's a hypocrite and a criminal to know that he's a criminal. What I want you to do is not to cant to yourself. I want you to say to yourself that you're one of those men who are predestined to grind the faces of the poor."

"Well, I suppose I am," Mr. Fleight answered.

"And I want you to realise," Mr. Blood continued, "that you're one of those men who are making the people useless."

"I won't deny it," Mr. Fleight answered, "if you'll tell me how."

"Well, look at the telegraph clerk that you told me about," Mr. Blood said. "That's the type of the utterly useless person your conditions have produced. An almost incredible chatterer with a head full of snippets and a mouth that was a perfect geyser of democratic balderdash. That's what you produce. That's what you'll be producing through the whole nation—a crowd of fools, too discontented to do an honest job, but too filled by their education with uneasiness to do anything to lose the job they've cadged themselves into. It's the worst type the world has ever produced in any age or in any nation, and the circumstances that have produced

you are responsible for it. You went ferreting about in the household of the Leroys, and what was the political message that you brought out of it? What did Mr. Leroy want most?"

Mr. Fleight waited for a moment until he was certain that Mr. Blood wanted an answer. Then he said:

"What he seems most to want politically—is to be let alone."

"Then that's all there is to it," Mr. Blood said. "That's what that uneducated man feels with the passionate and certain instinct of race preservation. Don't you understand? These lower classes are a race. In this country the difference between class and class—between one immense revolving iron disc and the other—the difference is so vast that you can't go down into the class below you without causing infinite disaster—disaster to the individual and to the class. You mixed with that working family and you've brought disaster on them and on yourself. There never was an instance of the kind that wasn't disastrous. There are people who have working men to table with them, and at the very best the working man just becomes a cadging snob, reading William Morris and expecting you to leave him large legacies. I tell you it's a thing that's bound to bring disaster. India, for instance, was a contented place when the British treated all the natives as dogs who were inconceivably outside their range of society—when they just didn't mix socially. It became the bear garden of ineffective education that it is as soon as the Whigs let the brown men into their drawing-rooms. That, I assure you, is the moral of the world."

"It's a pretty beastly moral," Mr. Fleight said.

"It's a pretty beastly world," Mr. Blood answered. "What else do you expect?"

"That's why I want to get out of it," Mr. Fleight answered. "I want to sit quiet in the corner."

Mr. Blood remained lost in reflection for quite a long time. The candles had burnt down nearly into their sockets on the tall mantelpiece, and Mr. Blood got up to blow out three of the six. The dawn showed itself pointing round the cracks of the tall shutters. Mr. Blood stood looking at Mr. Fleight with an aspect of commiseration and of kindliness.

"Yes, it's an intricate, incomprehensible life you're in for," he said. "No one has ever sounded it, and no one ever will. We've all got too polite, you see, and too kindly and too friendly ever to look anything in the face. That's the real trouble—Civilisation. But as for your getting out of it," he said quickly, "Augusta just won't let you."

And then he said: "It's four o'clock. I shall probably never speak to you like this again. As far as I'm concerned you've reached the high-water mark of your career of intimacy with me, and to-morrow we go back into—what is it—the giddy whirl of fashion and corruption and inquests and entertainments."

He went towards the door and yawned deeply.

"I'll just sit here and think, if you don't mind," Mr. Fleight said. "I suppose it won't matter if I open one of the shutters and go out into the garden?"

"Oh, it won't matter," Mr. Blood answered; "and you can compose a splendid sonnet to the lady who is sleeping overhead."

"It isn't that that bothers me so much," Mr. Fleight answered. "I want to consider the case of the unfortunate Mr. Gregory and the lunacy people."

"Ah!" Mr. Blood said; "I thought that that of all my conversation would appeal to you most. You want

to sweep the old sort of corruption out of the country. The new sort hardly appeals to your imagination enough to make you want to stop it."

"Well, I'm a modern man," Mr. Fleight answered.

"So you are," Mr. Blood said, not unkindly, and he went up to bed.

# PART III

# I

THE party to celebrate the founding of the *New Review* was in every way an immense personal success for Mr. Fleight. The *Review* itself had a dark-green cover, a solid, and, as it were, a somewhat threatening aspect. It existed, and it appeared as if it might have existed, for fifty years, and as if you would not dare to speak lightly of it, though you might, if you were someone quite distinguished, dislike it. It really exemplified what Mr. Debenham had said of the intellectual classes, and, at the same time, it found its way into a large number of influential homes. That was due to the activity of Augusta, who, fortified with a brougham, covered quite an astounding amount of space. To give an example :

There was a venerable, slightly muddled, but extremely talkative Dowager Countess of Essex. She was the president of the Domestic Servants' Rescue Society, which was an affair having sixty lady patrons and somewhat over two hundred servants on its books. Augusta wrote to this lady and stated that she wished, in the interests of the *New Review*, to have a conversation with her ladyship. She imagined that the valuable institution over which her ladyship so ably presided might very well, at some future time, form the subject of favourable comment in the *Review*. The Dowager Countess replied sleepily that she would be delighted if Miss Macphail would call upon her.

She gave Augusta a sleepy interview that was, nevertheless

less, fluttered by the Countess's imagining that she really was being interviewed. For, in these days, interviews being much rarer than they used to be, it is an agreeable thing for a Dowager Countess to see her name in print. Augusta, therefore, received a cup of weak tea and a considerable amount of information concerning Lady Essex's grandmother, the Duchess of Renfrew, whose letters Lady Essex vaguely proposed to print. And Augusta went away, leaving upon her ladyship an impression at once of prosperity and bewilderment, and leaving also a copy of the *New Review* upon the Countess's tea table.

The general effect of this proceeding was to make her ladyship talk to all her friends for a fortnight afterwards about the editor of *The Fortnightly Review* whom she imagined to have called upon her in a brougham. Then one of her ladyship's friends would announce that this seemed improbable, and her ladyship would send her ancient butler for the copy of the journal that Augusta had left. And when it was discovered that the periodical was not the *Fortnightly* but the *New Review*, the Countess, who had some sort of muddled pride, would assure everybody that the *New Review* was much the more important of the two, because its representative certainly drove about in a brougham. This, Lady Essex had seen, Augusta having called attention to it by saying she had a humane heart and didn't like to keep her horse standing. In that way Lady Essex became an ardent champion of Mr. Fleight's enterprise, for, in order to make herself seem important—and, poor woman, she hadn't had the chance of that for years and years—it was necessary that she should make the *Review* itself seem as important as possible.

It is not to be imagined that these proceedings had any

effect whatever upon the sale of the *Review*, for no friend of Lady Essex could, by any imaginable possibility, be thought of as expending half a crown upon any form of literature. Indeed, when the accounts of the new periodical came to be made out, it was found that the number of copies sold of the first and all the subsequent numbers was well under three hundred. This came about because every member of the intellectual classes of this country imagined that he or she had a right to a free copy, and got it by one method of cadging or another. There was only one type of person to whom Mr. Fleight resolutely ordered that the periodical was not to be sent free, and that was the secretary of working men's clubs. Mr. Mitchell received several letters, all very similar in tone, stating that the members of one or other working man's club, numbering from three hundred to six hundred members, considered that the *New Review* was absolutely necessary for the good of their intellects or their souls as the case might be. The secretaries were perfectly certain, considering the worthy and philanthropic nature of their institutions, as well as the good they were doing to the cause of progress, that Mr. Mitchell would certainly let them have from one to three free copies of his *Review*, to be placed on the reading-room tables.

To each such letter Mr. Fleight determinedly ordered a stereotyped reply to be sent. Mr. Fleight said that the memberships of these clubs were large, and if thirty of the members could be found once a month to walk a penny tram fare, smoke a quarter of an ounce of tobacco less, drink one pennyworth of beer less or go without two halfpenny papers, they could not only improve their physical conditions, but would provide the half-crown necessary for the purchase of an organ that would do so

much good to the spiritual side of their beings. Mr. Fleight was, indeed, thinking of the moral lesson that Mr. Blood read him, and was refraining from pauperising the working classes. But, ignorant of the fact, and alarmed at the failure of what had been a hitherto invariably successful form of blackmail, the secretaries of the clubs with one accord, and in almost the same form, replied that Mr. Fleight was a brute with no knowledge of the life of the working classes and no love for progress. The secretary of an institution situated in Fulham went so far as to make biting allusions to Mr. Fleight's appearance, not only in the hooligan case, but at the inquest on Miss Leroy. And it is not to be said that Mr. Fleight did not find these painful.

Indeed, the trials themselves proved quite as painful as anyone could have expected, though the coroner's inquest was very decorously conducted. Mr. Fleight gently gave evidence that there was no particular reason why Miss Leroy should have called upon him, though there was certainly no reason whatever why she shouldn't. It appeared, indeed, from the evidence of Mrs. Leroy that Gilda's only motive was to gaze upon Mr. Fleight's marble halls before she committed suicide. And she had determined to commit suicide as soon as, behind the sheet, she had heard that Mr. Fleight was unquestionably not for her. And Mrs. Leroy, who was really quite sorry for Mr. Fleight, did her very best to make him come off without the reputation of the betrayer of her daughter.

As has been said, the proceedings before the coroner were perfectly decorous, and, although they were very widely reported, the only thing that appeared at all discreditable to Mr. Fleight was the question of his name.

The coroner, a quite amiable but rather old gentleman, could not understand how or why at Palatial Hall, Mr. Fleight should be Mr. Fleight whilst at Byefleet he was Mr. Rothweil. The reason that Mr. Fleight gave was that his legal name was Rothweil, he being the legitimate son of the late soap-boiler, and, coming for the first time before the world, he had thought that it was proper and more formal to use his legal name. The coroner however, was unable to understand why he should ever have used any other. And it was a little unfortunate that, just as Mr. Fleight was explaining that the real name of his mother, Miss Maggie Tallantyre, was Fleight, the coroner should say :

" Well, well, I suppose it's no affair of mine, and it certainly appears to have nothing to do with this case. I ought not, perhaps, to have asked the question."

Reported in the newspapers this gave the general impression that there were discreditable episodes in the past career of Mr. Fleight, and that he had used that name for the purpose of masking his identity. That, however, had been only an impression.

The preliminary trial of Mr. Fleight's assailants went off very quietly, too. Mr. Fleight had had practically no evidence to give at all. The assault had taken place in the dark and he had no means of identifying the men. The prisoners were indeed identified mainly by their own confessions, and they were sent to take their trial at the Quarter Sessions, the two soldiers being allowed out on bail. There were five prisoners altogether.

The trial at the Sessions took place in a fortnight. This was just five days before Mr. Fleight's entertainment, and five days also before the nomination for the Byefleet election. Everyone had expected the election to come much sooner, but the Government had deter-

mined to put it off as long as possible in order to give their candidate time to mature his organisation. They had, therefore, refrained from conferring on Mr. Cronck, who was in Spain, the Stewardship of the Chiltern Hundreds, and they had not even applied for the writ until three days after the suicide of Miss Leroy.

The trial at the Quarter Sessions was a really horrible ordeal for poor Mr. Fleight. The counsel defending two of the prisoners was a smart man with an oily manner ; the counsel defending the other three was a loud-mouthed brute, and Mr. Fleight had to undergo cross-examination at the hands of both of these gentlemen. He remained perfectly calm and quite adroit in his replies, but it was altogether an agony for him, and he was in the witness box over a couple of hours.

It probably would not have been so bad if everyone in court, and particularly the Common Sergeant, had not been in various stages of great ill-humour. This was principally on account of the hot weather, which had by that time begun to be very severe, and indeed that afternoon a great thunderstorm broke over the city. Throughout the whole of the case the Common Sergeant said, at almost every remark uttered by either counsel, " Get on, get on ! What has that got to do with the matter ? " So that Mr. Fleight's counsel, who was a mild, incompetent man, the brother-in-law of the solicitors whom he employed, hardly managed to get a speech out at all, because the Common Sergeant so dazed and muddled him. Both the barristers for the defence harped eloquently on the fact that the prisoners they represented were heroes trying to rid their neighbourhood of a public pest, and the Common Sergeant refused to allow either of the Leroys to be called to give testimony as to the excellence of Mr. Fleight's behaviour and the purity

of his intentions. One of the defending barristers stated that Mr. Fleight was a monster in human form; the other hinted with great effect that the candidate for Byefleet had made the larger part of his fortune in what is known as the White Slave Traffic.

In his summing up the Common Sergeant remarked that that hadn't anything to do with the case. Probably, Mr. Fleight had come into the Leroy's neighbourhood with the most sinister intentions. What other reason had he, a very rich man, for going to such a place? But that was none of the Common Sergeant's business. And having done his best to smash Mr. Fleight he went on to smash the prisoners. He said that the law had nothing to say to the motive for a crime. It was possible that the prisoners had acted with the intention of clearing their neighbourhood of a person dangerous to the females residing there. But that sort of thing must be stopped. And after the finding of the jury he sentenced each of the prisoners to two years' hard labour in spite of the fact that all five of them had excellent records and that they were all below the age of nineteen. His final remark was that he hoped that the suicide of Miss Leroy would be a warning to Mr. Fleight, or one of these days that gentleman would find himself in serious trouble.

It was astonishing to Mr. Fleight himself how much these imbecile remarks hurt him. They were simply imbecile, but each of them rankled because, in an odd sort of way, he found it almost impossible to differentiate himself in his own mind from the criminal that they tried to make him out to be. He kept himself perfectly calm by an effort of will, but within himself he felt an individual boiling over with the desire to treat the Common Sergeant and all the counsel as the hooligans had treated him. And, if he hadn't had Miss Macphail seated as his

secretary in the body of the court, so that he could look down upon her when he was in the witness box, it is probable that he would have given violent expression to his feelings. His great wealth had bred in him a certain recklessness. Outside the realm of crime there was practically nothing that he could not have been able to afford himself, and contempt of court wasn't a thing that would have bothered him very much.

With his eyes on Augusta, he had to feel that he couldn't afford to jeopardise any further his endangered career. Besides, after he was out of the box Augusta, sitting beside him, didn't refrain from uttering the words, "Rot" and "Perfectly rotten" when the defending counsel and the Common Sergeant in their speeches made references to Mr. Fleight. And, as they went out of the court together, she remarked:

"This is the most disgusting instance of British justice that even I have ever heard of."

So that Mr. Fleight remarked to her:

"You don't believe in the charges made against me?"

"Do I look such a fool?" Augusta answered almost contemptuously.

This speech emboldened Mr. Fleight to invite Augusta to lunch with him at the Carlton, and in the lounge he proposed to her.

She told him she wouldn't even think of marrying him, and she gave him her reasons. She said she didn't care for him, but that wouldn't matter because she hadn't ever cared for anybody and she didn't suppose she was going to. What did really matter was that she couldn't bring herself to believe in him. Augusta's attitude, indeed, even towards Mr. Fleight's fortune was very curious. She could not bring herself to believe in it, just as she could not understand why you couldn't give

a British voter two pounds by way of bribery when you might spend four thousand in erecting a bath for two hundred of them. What she probably really felt, though she never analysed herself far enough to discover it, was that although she knew Mr. Fleight had a great deal of money, she couldn't believe that he was the sort of person to take care of it, and in that case he might just as well not have had it. She regarded him in fact as unlucky. So that when Mr. Fleight said :

" Oh, Augusta, I thought from the way you behaved in court that you were beginning to have some sympathy for me."

She retorted :

" Sympathy ! Of course I had sympathy for you—the sort of sympathy that you have for a cat when three dachshunds have got hold of it. But you don't want to marry the cat. Now do you ? "

She regarded Mr. Fleight with her clear, hard, blue eyes. She was looking astonishingly beautiful. Driving about in the brougham had restored to her complexion some of its more shell-like tints, and, having found a job that so exactly amused and interested her—for she didn't really want to do anything better in life than call on countesses, as she was doing all day long—a great deal of the hardness of her manner was disappearing and, during lunch, she had said several amusing, but quite withering things, about the personalities of some of Mr. Fleight's political opponents.

She said that the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for instance, was like a gramophone which had learnt with difficulty to say one word—" enthusiasm." This wasn't a particularly good joke, but it had its point because, the night before, they had heard the Chancellor address a meeting of ten thousand dock operatives at Chatham,

and the great man's huge features, high voice and perpetual repetition of the same phrases were still very strongly in both their minds.

"No," Augusta continued her frightful speech, "I don't feel a repulsion from you as I used to do. It's quite possible to have you about. But I simply don't believe you'd be good business for a woman to marry. You don't have any luck. I wouldn't have minded half so much if you had done what they said about you in court. But as you haven't, it makes you absolutely hopeless. You're just the exact opposite of the fairy story that I used to hear as a child, called 'Hans in Luck.' I don't see how you'll ever get even into Parliament, and frankly, I believe I can do better for myself than you can for me."

Mr. Fleight gave a deep groan and then he exclaimed:

"At any rate you don't feel a repulsion from me; that's something to go on."

"Oh, you're all right," Miss Macphail answered, "you're not a bit worse than the editor of the *Westminster Weekly* I used to work for, and I put up with him."

Mr. Fleight had real, large tears in his eyes, and he went straight off to Mr. Blood to give him an account of the interview. Mr. Blood, however, only wanted to hear about the trial. Mr. Blood said very sensibly that it wasn't Mr. Fleight's job to sit worrying about Augusta; it would be very much better for him if he tried to do something to get himself a less unlucky aspect in her eyes. And then he went straight off to see the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

He wanted to get the Chancellor to attend Mr. Fleight's party. He had some luck. The Chancellor was to have gone that afternoon to a garden-party, where eleven thousand people from Scotland, Cornwall and Wales had

been invited to meet him at tea. But towards half-past three, just as Mr. Blood set off from Burton Street, a really terrible hurricane descended upon London. Its precursor had been the heat which had rendered so irritable the Common Sergeant. And, indeed, the Common Sergeant's temper turned out to be a piece of luck for Mr. Blood.

He found the Chancellor standing on the doorstep in Downing Street with his top hat on, surveying doubtfully the huge sheets of water that fell even between him and the door of Mr. Blood's motor. Mr. Blood charged swiftly out and right into the hall. The Chancellor said:

"Hullo! What's this? Woman's Suffrage?" and then he smiled. "What do you think of this weather? Not much weather for a garden-party; what?"

"You'd better give up the garden-party," Mr. Blood said, "and give ten minutes to me. I want to ask you a favour."

An enormous peal of thunder shook all the windows in the Treasury building, and the Chancellor again closed the umbrella that he had half opened. And, indeed, just at that moment, a dark young man, who was his secretary, came to say that the storm had blown down all the marquees in Lady Guestling's garden and that the grounds, which lay rather low, resembled a lake. Her ladyship begged that the Chancellor wouldn't even think of coming. She had just telephoned through.

"Well, we can get back to the estimates," the Chancellor said contentedly, but Mr. Blood cut in:

"Look here, just give me ten minutes of your time. I want to ask a favour. I don't mind saying that I'll make it really worth your while."

"Of course, if it's a matter of a favour," the Chancellor said. "Yes, yes, anything that I can do—I'm sure——" His manner was quite vacant, because

he imagined that Mr. Blood was going to ask for a job for his brother Reginald, and the Chancellor, with his exceedingly tenacious mind, was perfectly determined that he would not give Reginald any job in the Civil Service. That would preclude his entering Parliament, and the Chancellor desired that Reginald should enter Parliament.

" I'm not really a man of straw," Mr. Blood said again, " and, if you can oblige me, I'll certainly make it worth your while."

The Chancellor said :

" Oh, that's all right. Certainly—Yes, yes. Come with me."

He took Mr. Blood into the rather dark, rather small room on the left of the door, where there were two young men working at desks. He put his hat on the mantelshelf, dropped his umbrella on the floor, and looked at the papers that lay before first one young man and then the other.

" That word ought to be ' Battlefleets '—you understand. ' Battlefleets of Austria '—not simply ' fleets ' " he said, " ' Battlefleets ' sounds so much better." He then remarked : " Hum, hum," and stood in front of Mr. Blood, who had sat himself down. " Oh, yes, a favour," he said. " What is it we want now ? "

" I want you," Mr. Blood said, " to come to Fleight's party."

" Fleight ? " the Chancellor said, " I don't know. Who's he ? I don't suppose I shall have any time—I never have any time. You're very lucky to get this ten minutes. I don't suppose I could have given you ten minutes any other day for the next six months."

" Mr. Fleight," Mr. Blood remarked, " has just been outrageously handled in a trial."

The Chancellor's face fell in a sort of panic. He had got it firmly fixed in his head that Mr. Blood wanted a job for his brother, and he had not yet grasped the fact that he was speaking of somebody else.

"A trial!" he exclaimed. "We can't have anything to do with trials. Don't you understand? Interfering with the judiciary! That's impossible."

"But it was before the Common Sergeant," Mr. Blood said cunningly. The Common Sergeant was one of those old and old-fashioned criminal magistrates who greatly inconvenience and irritate all progressive Governments in this country. He was continually inflicting barbarously harsh sentences, which the humanitarian Home Secretary as regularly reduced. Then the Common Sergeant would make from the bench biting remarks as to the Home Secretary and the Government in general. He was thus a perpetual scandal, so that he was detested by all the members of the Ministry.

"Oh, the Common Sergeant!" the Chancellor exclaimed. "He's the devil of a fellow. I believe he gives the Home Office more trouble—at least, so I've heard. . . . We certainly ought to get rid of him. But the difficulty is one doesn't know how it's to be done."

"You'd certainly give him a very nice slap in the face," Mr. Blood continued, "if you'd come to Mr. Fleight's party."

"But who is Mr. Fleight?" the Chancellor asked—and then, attempting to show a jocular benevolence, he added: "What is he that you should thus commend him?" for he had a liking for the music of Schubert.

"He's the Opposition candidate for Byefleet," Mr. Blood brought out.

"I suppose," the Chancellor said, "you mean the Government candidate. I can't keep these fellows' names in my head, but I had a vague idea it was Gregory."

"Gregory's got a writ for lunacy out against him," Mr. Blood said.

"Oh, I see," the Chancellor said, "then Gregory's retiring and Mr. Fleight's taking his place."

"I don't know so much about that," Mr. Blood answered, "but Mr. Fleight's moving heaven and earth to get Gregory out of the clutches of the lunacy people. He wants to attack the whole system. He's, just this morning, started to instruct his solicitors to put about twenty men on the job to find out all the possible cases that could be published."

"Well, it's a very difficult job," the Chancellor said, "I tried to reform them myself about four years ago. You remember my bill? But it hasn't done much good. Still it's a striking attempt—very creditable. I hope your friend will get in."

"He's the Opposition candidate, you know," Mr. Blood said.

"But you said he's trying to help our man!" the Chancellor exclaimed. "The story doesn't hang together."

"It wouldn't hang together," Mr. Blood said, "if my chap wasn't so incredibly chivalrous. The moment he heard that your man was in danger of being shut up he almost went off his head about it."

The Chancellor suddenly sat down upon a chair in front of Mr. Blood.

"This is a most extraordinary story," he said. "Suppose you go through it in detail."

Mr. Blood did go into it in detail. He told the circumstances of the trial in such a way as quite sensibly

to enrage the Chancellor against the Common Sergeant. He told the story of Mr. Gregory in such a way as to make the great man hot in favour of that unfortunate individual. He pointed out that such chivalry as Mr. Fleight was showing ought to be rewarded by a similar chivalry from the Government. Most particularly he stated that Mr. Fleight wasn't to be regarded necessarily as an opponent of the Government, and that if the Chancellor treated him prettily now, it might very well affect his attitude in the future. Besides, it was a public duty to give the Common Sergeant a slap in the face.

The Chancellor shook his head perplexedly.

"I wish I knew what to do!" he exclaimed. "I don't know. You see I haven't my usual advisers with me—the people who make up my mind about social affairs. It seems to me an unconventional affair—of course, that doesn't matter to me. I'm not afraid of unconventional affairs—but still——"

"If you'll come to Mr. Fleight's party," Mr. Blood said suddenly, "I'll put my brother Reginald up for Byefleet at the next election, and I'll stand all the expenses myself. It won't hurt you to be decent to Mr. Fleight, and some official person ought to be, because he's the victim of a gross miscarriage of justice. It won't hurt you to do this one decent thing in the welter of dirty business that politics is. Mr. Fleight hasn't got the ghost of a chance of getting in for Byefleet."

The Chancellor remained abstracted for a moment, and then he said:

"You'll put your brother up? He's the sort of man I very much want. I think—Yes, I think, I say—I'll come. I'll almost certainly come. Why shouldn't I take a line myself for once? It isn't as if

I was particularly satisfied with the lines I'm usually advised to take."

Mr. Blood rose. "I daresay," he said, "you'll get put off, or your official secretary will persuade you not to come. But perhaps you'll give me permission to include your name amongst the printed list of those who have accepted the invitation?"

"Oh, but I'll certainly come," the Chancellor said briskly, "I never go back on my word. Besides, this is rather a romantic expedition. It'll shake the cobwebs out of me. I like parties of non-political people, only I never get the chance to go to them, and here it appears to be actually a duty. I want to see the Russian dancers, too. I've never had time. I hear they're quite remarkable. Perhaps you'll keep their performance back until I'm able to get there."

"Oh, we'll certainly do that," Mr. Blood answered. He was preparing to leave the room when the Chancellor exclaimed:

"By the bye, Mr. Blood, if you can spare me another minute—— You know those words—or rather that sentiment that you are always using—what I might call the cross-bow sentiment. And the other day you said, you know, that something was going to sweep me over—and then you say we are antediluvian. Now what does that all mean?"

Mr. Blood turned back from the door.

"It's got a meaning," he said. "It's got the precise and actual meaning attaching to the words."

"But you say we're old-fashioned," the Chancellor expostulated in an almost shocked tone of voice. "We can't possibly be old-fashioned, because we're inspired by the great fine truths. They don't ever grow stale. The greatest good of the greatest number, for instance."

"Well," Mr. Blood answered, "I'm not going to preach Malthusianism in this atmosphere—you can't expect it, can you?—since I don't care a bit for one principle or another. If your opponents had any sense they'd set up the answering war-cry of the greatest good of the most efficient. And that would probably bring them to office for another ten years and set party politics on its legs again. It's party politics that's dying and you with it. But your opponents are too stupid and too cowardly, so that they're done for already. And you'll be done for soon, because you'll go howling your old battle-cry until you've bored people to death. I don't mean you, personally, because you're always exciting to listen to — but all your understrappers — the intolerable bores with their pamphlets and so on. That's really the point, you won't have any opponents, and your voice will go on bow-wowing into the empty air. What will overcome you will be corruption and boredom and dilettantism. That's what our nation wants—a bored dilettante, of the most amiable possible kind, to be a dictator. And no talking. Absolutely no talking. The nation's sick to death of eloquence and wants to get back to its spillikins and post-card collecting and coon-can. Even bridge has become too exhausting for the tired national brain."

The Chancellor looked in a depressed manner at Mr. Blood.

"It's only too true," he said. "There's much too little enthusiasm. If only men like you with your brains and intelligence would try to waken the nation up——"

"Heavens!" Mr. Blood said, "you don't expect *me* to care about the nation!"

He left the Chancellor slowly shaking his immense head.

## II

MR. MACPHERSON, in evening dress, and with the attitudes and action of a mad rabbit, was rushing from end to end of a hall, so brilliantly lit, so immense, and so empty, that, beneath the high pink arches like those of St. Peter's at Rome, beneath the high dome reminiscent of the Mosque of St. Sofia at Constantinople, in front of the set of boxes in the style of the Empire Music Hall in London, he appeared to be a mere speck of agitated matter. His coat-tails flew out behind him; he pounced upon one end of a pink Turkey carpet as large as an acre field and tried to drag it into a new position over the polished yellow floor that had been prepared for dancing. He failed in his effort, and he tried the corner of another that lay beside the first one and failed once more to move it. In the the immense and empty space all his movements echoed and re-echoed, so that he might have been himself initiating another Balaclava Charge, for bullet shots appeared to be aimed at him from beside, from above, and from each end of the hall. The silence seemed to him, so unaccustomed was he to any form of silence, boding, and immensely agitating. Sweat burst out upon his forehead, and he wiped it away with a bright green handkerchief. Then he exclaimed at the top of his voice:

"Oh, why don't they come! Why doesn't anybody come?"

Staid and quite unmoved, an elderly waiter appeared in a little doorway below the gallery that faced the stage,

and, with a singular and impressive tininess, he walked across the middle of the huge pink carpets.

"Why doesn't anyone come!" Mr. Macpherson exclaimed to him. "I seem to have been here for hours. Everything will be ruined if someone is not here soon."

The waiter looked at him with a cold and aloof air into which a little compassion gradually filtered at the sight of Cluny's evident and deep concern.

"It's only half-past ten, sir," he said, "and, as the entertainment doesn't begin until half-past eleven, I don't think there is any cause for concern."

"But it's terrible, the waiting. Supposing nobody should come? No one at all."

"I don't see that you need fear that, sir," the waiter said. "Miss Macphail said that we were to expect between six hundred and a thousand guests."

"But supposing," Mr. Macpherson said again, "the stories against Mr. Rothweil——" He stopped and after a moment the waiter said:

"At any rate you can be certain, sir, that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is coming. I don't mind telling you, sir, that the Chancellor's secretary telephoned through to our manager at least an hour ago to ask what time the Russian dancers would be performing, as he might be a quarter of an hour late, and he begged Mr. Rothweil not to let them begin until he was here."

Mr. Macpherson heaved a sigh of relief, but immediately afterwards his face became agonised, and he exclaimed:

"But supposing he was the only person who came! Suppose him standing quite alone in the middle of this place looking at the Russian dancers. What would he think? What in the world would he think?"

The head waiter, although he was used to instances

of stage fright on the part of hostesses and even of hosts, of large parties, had never seen an individual so panic-stricken as Mr. Macpherson, which struck him as being all the more odd in that it was not Mr. Macpherson who was giving the party at all. He said, however—and it was the usual device that, on such occasions, he adopted to distract the attentions of troubled patrons :

" Wouldn't you like to come and look at the refreshments ; it isn't at all necessary that there should be any superintendence, because we manage these affairs so that the giver of the entertainment can just walk into the place on the minute it begins."

" Yes, yes," Mr. Macpherson exclaimed, " let me look at the refreshments."

The waiter led Cluny through the small door beneath the gallery into another vast apartment, the roof of which was supported by columns of canary yellow marble. Here, upon long tables, there were arranged the viands for a thousand people. In the centre of each table was a great block of ice, as clear as glass and containing, the one a salmon as large as a child, and two others, peacocks with all their feathers on and their plumes erect and shining. There were innumerable peaches, lobsters, mounds of caviar, sandwiches, fruit salads and, sprayed all amongst them, a perfect shrubbery of pink flowers, so that to walk along the tables was like taking an excursion through a nursery garden. Behind these tables, like mournful attendants upon a funeral, stood many men in dress waistcoats, but with their coats still off. And these regarded Mr. Macpherson with such mournful, threatening and condemnatory eyes, and in a silence so dead, that Mr. Macpherson felt forced to rush once more into the lighted room.

If it would be too much to say that Mr. Macpherson

was filled with a deep contrition for his exploits at Mr. Rothweil's meeting—for, typical Englishman as Mr. Blood proclaimed him, he was probably incapable of any deep passion whatsoever—still he kept a little of the Englishman's spirit concerning an event which he couldn't regard as anything but sporting. Moreover, he had something of the pride of office, since he, Cluny Macpherson, had been requested by Mr. Blood himself to come to the place early and see that things were all right.

It was the day of the nomination at Byefleet, and Mr. Fleight would have had to hand in his papers personally some time during the afternoon. He might, therefore, possibly be slightly delayed in his journey up to town ; a tyre might come off, or something of that sort. Miss Macphail would be rather busily employed because, in the first place, Mr. Fleight desired her attendance on him at Byefleet, and in the second, she, her mother and Wilhelmina were on that very day moving into their new house at Kensington. There might, therefore, be possible difficulties about their dressing for the entertainment. Neither of these things was to be expected, but still they might happen. And Mr. Macpherson spent an agitated half hour in playing, against himself, a game of noughts and crosses. By the grace of God, as he considered it, he discovered an old dance programme with its pencil attached to it by a cord, in one of the tail pockets of his dress coat. And suddenly it came into his head that it would be a glorious lark if neither Miss Macphail nor Mr. Fleight turned up at the entertainment and if, in the capacity of host, he was to receive a thousand guests, including forty-two peers, eleven peeresses, sixty actors and actresses, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer as a *bonne bouche*. And he almost wished that he had put on the scarlet

ribbon of the Hamidjeh of the third class that had been conferred on his father by one of the eunuchs of the deposed Sultan in return for some financial assistance.

A slight brushing sound made itself heard near the central door, and Mr. Fleight came in, looking intensely dejected, and tinier even than Mr. Macpherson in the enormous and deserted space.

He came up to Mr. Macpherson, holding out his gloved hand and expressing his cordial sense of the trouble that gentleman had taken in coming so early, and in his real lightness of heart, Mr. Macpherson at once burst into a long story of a chap he knew called Block, whose sister lived in Colombo, and invited the Crown Prince of Germany to tiffin. Mr. Fleight listened to him with polite and deep attention.

There came in Mr. Charles Mitchell in a very old evening suit as well as Mr. Raggett in a very new one. Immediately afterwards Mr. Blood appeared and then, with a considerable rustling, Frau Macphail, Augusta, and Wilhelmina. Frau Macphail was in a dress of stiff black silk, and wore a great widow's cap of white frilled muslin. Wilhelmina was in white, Augusta in dark blue with silver ornaments. To Mr. Fleight she appeared to realise exactly the lady in a poem called " Epipsychidion " about which he had written an essay at St. Paul's school. She had met him, as he told Mr. Blood, on life's dark way and lured him towards sweet death.

The voice of Frau Macphail, so high that it resembled a scream, and echoed from all the empty boxes and from the high dome, burst into a torrent of ravished delight at the appearance of the hall. It was the first thing she had seen since her arrival in the country which had filled her with any admiration for the genius of the British race. Two immense footmen, with powdered

hair, marched side by side across the empty hall, to push back the great French windows; beyond them the black depths of garden dimly suggested themselves. Then a remarkable butler came out from between two marble pillars and shouted in an enormous voice:

"Mr. and Mrs. Chivers."

The party had begun.

Mr. Chivers had a red nose and extraordinarily red hair; Mrs. Chivers had red hair and an extraordinarily white face. Mr. Fleight, standing like a depressed Field Marshal at the head of a staff, shook hands with each of them. To Mrs. Chivers he said that he would always remember her remarkable novel "The Wiles of Pompey," and to Mr. Chivers that it would be a long time before he forgot his able book "Turkish Harems from the Inside." He passed them on to Mr. Mitchell, who, with Mr. Raggett at his side, represented Editor and Sub-editor. Mr. Mitchell got up a conversation with Mr. Chivers about motor buses, although Mr. Chivers wanted to talk literature. Mrs. Chivers got up a conversation with Mr. Raggett about the burden of the rates in Wimbledon, where she resided, although Mr. Raggett desired to improve his knowledge of the German language by some conversation in that tongue with Frau Macphail. Augusta stood a little further from the door than Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Raggett, and just behind her was her mother, representing chaperonage. Mr. Blood and Wilhelmina were walking slowly side by side round and round the edges of the enormous hall.

Because Wilhelmina was up to the eyes in the details of furnishing the new house in Kensington, she talked about house keeping; and gradually their conversation drifted into a dissertation by Mr. Blood upon the topic of how the keepers of Soho

restaurants made such huge fortunes. Mr. Blood explained that the chief expense of those hosts lay in the cost of washing table linen. They could buy up the lease of a dirty little house quite cheaply and clean and paper it even more cheaply. Most of their meats they could buy from the large hotels, being what was left over from the day before, at very cheap rates. But washing was always washing. Table napkins cost always a penny per diner, and cloths twopence—on the average. So the restaurant keeper, if he was to prosper, had to scrape together enough capital to start a little laundry of his own in the country; and this paid him remarkably well. He added many details as to the lives of restaurant keepers, so that Wilhelmina and he quite enjoyed themselves, Wilhelmina wondering where he got his knowledge, and he being proud to exhibit it to anyone so docile and at the same time so intellectual. For Wilhelmina, besides being a delicate artist, had a remarkable gift for languages; had written sonnets in Italian and, though she seldom talked about it, knew more about Leopardi than most people.

No other guests arrived for three-quarters of an hour, so that conversation with Mr. and Mrs. Chivers became rather a languishing affair, more particularly as Mrs. Chivers, who had seen Augusta out of the corners of her eyes, had decided that she was not the sort of person that a woman really likes her husband to be introduced to, and obstinately refused to move away from Mr. Raggett and Mr. Mitchell. Their voices echoed in mournful whispers through the immense space. Mr. Fleight, nearest the door, stood perfectly silent with an air of deep dejection. He was probably the only person there who wasn't thinking about the party at all; for even Mr. Mitchell was so agitated that he mixed up the works of André

Gide, the prose writer, with those of Saint Pol Le Magnifique, who was a poet, although Mr. Mitchell really knew every word that each of these authors had written. This gratified Mr. Chivers, to whom he was talking, though Mr. Chivers knew nothing whatever about the matter. Mr. Raggett, too, was so agitated at the absence of guests that for five minutes he said nothing whatever to Mrs. Chivers, and during that space of time he and that lady gazed at each other with eyes that seemed to express a deep and mournful sympathy, though actually they were racking their brains for something to talk about. At 11.35 Mr. Macpherson dashed into the hall exclaiming :

" Hurray, it's all right now ! "

He explained that twenty-five motor cars, eleven taxis, nine broughams and three carriages and pairs had been held up by the collision of two buses, slewing right across the top of the road and inextricably locked together, whilst the road opposite Marlborough House was " up " and completely impassable. All these vehicles had, at Cluny's suggestion to a policeman, been deflected through St. George's Square, and were now, all of them, setting down guests for Mr. Fleight.

" And it's all my doing," Mr. Macpherson explained jubilantly, " if it hadn't been for me that policeman would never have thought of sending them round." And having made this announcement to Mr. Fleight, to Mr. and Mrs. Chivers, to Mr. Mitchell and to Mr. Raggett, he plunged at Augusta and made it over again and then rushed across the room to Mr. Blood and Wilhelmina, who were just going into the garden :

" Thousands of people are coming," he exclaimed, " you never saw such a sight ! "

And indeed they came. It was like a presentation at

Court ; it was like a bargain sale ; it was like a battle-field, and the great actors and actresses of the day poured in with such speed and volubility that the other guests had the sensation of assisting at a gigantic theatrical gala incorporating all the ball-room scenes of every drama of manners that had been produced during the last twenty years.

The theatrical people in fact gave the note of the party. You couldn't look anywhere without seeing one of them being himself or herself, in a loud voice and with attitudes borrowed from the favourite character of his most successful piece. The orchestra from the Opera had arrived and began the overture to Strauss' Rosenkavalier. But so deafening was the noise of tongues and so close the pressure of bodies, that the orchestra remained inaudible and unseen. People swept past Mr. Fleight in droves, as if every glitteringly dressed person in London had turned into an emigrant and was rushing on to the decks of a steamer along a gangway. The remarkable butler never missed one of them, and a perfect fusillade of well-known names burst and rattled near the doors. It was as if a brazen megaphone were braying out the results of a perusal of the work of reference called " Who's Who." There were Mr. and Mrs. Cocks and Dickinson who wrote for the *Review*. Mr. Dickinson was a large and impressive person with curls like Lord Byron's, and normally he stood out in a crowd. But that evening his coat was nearly pulled off his back by Madame La Comtesse de Girouette, who had come from the French Embassy along with Mr. Picpus, extra Secretary of Legislation. She slipped upon the marble steps and only saved herself by catching hold of Mr. Dickinson's coat tails. Field-Marshal Sir Andrew How, who had been induced to come by Mr. Blood him-

self, a very shy man, was overwhelmed with confusion at the sight of this immense gathering and tried to go away. But he was pushed by the oncoming Castors, Chilcotts, Nelsons and O'Donoghues, positively into the arms of Mr. Fleight, who had to save him from falling. When Lord and Lady Cummyns, very shy people too, who had an income of about three hundred pounds a year, and hardly ever went to parties because they couldn't afford to dress, had just given their names to the butler, Miss Clare Langham, the illustrious novelist, was so determined to be announced at the very earliest opportunity that she pushed right between the frightened peer and his wife and put her own foot through her red plush skirt. This caused some dismay, but she too was brushed aside. Mr. Parment entered without attracting any attention at all, and he stood saying some kind words about Mr. Fleight's efforts on behalf of Mr. Gregory.

Gradually the whispers went through the hall that the Chancellor of the Exchequer was there. Then everyone was pleased at once, and it became the gayest huge party that had ever been given. The theatrical people did, of course, more to promote this happiness than the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but still, Mr. Parment added something to the satisfaction. For, if it is the most delightful thing in the world to have one of the queens of the stage dig her elbow into your back, it is also pleasant to hold a plate of ice-cream, in a crowd at the buffet, over the head of a Chancellor of the Exchequer in the effort to hand it to a crushed lady behind him. Indeed, the Statesman, being more human, will probably catch your eye and smile friendlily at your efforts, whilst the actress will be merely irritated at your back for getting in the way of her elbow.

Two Parliamentary under-secretaries and the Leader

of the Opposition with two other front-bench Opposition men—the House having just risen—arrived almost immediately after the Chancellor, the last three having been forced to go there by Mr. Garstein, who wanted to give value for money received. And these six statesmen stood awkwardly in a horse-shoe round the door, not having the slightest idea of what they ought to say to each other. Mr. Fleight tried to introduce Augusta to the Leader of his own party, but Mr. Blood was just carrying that brilliant lady off along the side of the hall. Mr. Fleight gave instructions that the Russian dancers should be asked to begin their performance, and having introduced, with a calm dejection, three actresses, one painter's wife, who was extraordinarily pretty, and Lady Cummyns to five of the other Statesmen, he introduced Miss Clare Langham, the enormously great authoress who had torn her skirt, to the Leader of the Opposition. He had expressed a strong desire to make that lady's acquaintance. He said that hers were the only books he ever read.

With these twelve behind him, Mr. Fleight pushed a passage through the crowd towards the boxes at the end of the hall. But when he opened the door of the first box he saw, silhouetted against the light, the large forms of Augusta and Mr. Blood. He closed the door gently and conducted the politicians to boxes further on. From one of them he had to eject Mr. Macpherson, who had ensconced himself there with a very small actress, dressed almost entirely in tulle. Mr. Macpherson however, insisted on introducing this lady to every one of the six political leaders. He had met them all in the drawing-rooms of wealthy supporters of either party, for there was nowhere that Mr. Macpherson did not go. And, since Mr. Fleight desired to be kind to Mr.

Macpherson, he took on himself the company of the young actress, who led him into the deserted supper room and gave him a long and minute account of why she had left a touring company at the Theatre Royal, Leeds. In that way Mr. Fleight never saw the Russian dancers.

. . . . . .

On the unusually high stage, so that they appeared to be elevated in the air—and this was done for the benefit of the audience that was forced to stand in the body of the hall—in garments of scarlet, green, purple and indigo, the dancers sprang here and there. They simulated languor, passion, despair, rage, death and ecstasy. The orchestra played long, cloying melodies and harmonies whose discords resolved themselves into sweetness after having been very long sustained. To the people in the boxes, the audience appeared like an immense tesselated pavement that moved very slightly —the heads of the men and small portions of their black coats being, as it were, set into the white shoulders of the women with their variegated clothes. Sometimes they were quite silent in order to listen to the music, but now and again a small cluster of talk would begin in one corner of the space and rush suddenly, like a wave, right across the assembly to beat against the other side of the hall and echo into the arches and into the dome, so high overhead. And then again the talk would suddenly die down as if a re-awakened reverence had filled them all again with the intense desire to listen to the music of Borodine. There was only one actress, in the far corner, near the stage, who kept up a continual chatter in a strident voice. She was jealous because the dancers attracted so much attention, and from time to time everybody in the hall heard a slice of an adventure of a

friend of the lady's called Tony Hartogg, who had a large golden tooth. . . .

And Mr. Blood, looking down upon the multitude, remarked to Augusta in an undertone :

" Now, isn't all this good enough ? "

Augusta, with her eyes still upon the dancers, answered :

" If you mean ' good enough ' to make me marry Mr. Fleight—frankly, no, I don't."

" But consider," Mr. Blood said, " all that it does mean."

" If you will explain what that is," Augusta answered, " I might be better able to come to a conclusion. All that I can see is that your friend has spent, as nearly as possible, three thousand pounds in order to give free drinks to a lot of loafers. They won't owe him any obligation. Why should they ? Of course I may be wrong. I don't pretend to understand everything of the society of this country."

" What you say, Augusta," Mr. Blood answered, " would be perfectly true if our friend were going to go under. If he became poor there would not be a single soul in this room who would give him a penny to buy a roll with. That's all right ; that's human nature. But our friend isn't going to go under, and that means that every one of the two thousand people in this room will do Mr. Fleight a small favour if he asks it. And, loafing, idle, and incompetent crowd that they are, they hold in their hands the influence of the whole Empire and of half the world besides. It isn't decent that they should, but there it is. If, for instance, you had a drunken brother that you wanted exported somewhere, and kept, you'd ask Mr. Fleight to speak to that man with a bulbous nose, or that other man with a face like a hawk—that one beside the pillar there—and one

of the men would give him the job of representing the Empire in, say, Madagascar ; or the other would make him the sole arbiter of life, death, and whisky over some three thousand niggers in a clearing in the centre of America where they're building a railway. They'll do these things, not out of any sense of gratitude to our friend, but simply in order not to be left out of the next party that he gives. After an affair like this, and if Mr. Fleight keeps it up, it will be more of a calamity not to be invited to one of Mr. Fleight's parties than if you were permanently struck off the list of the Royal Levees."

Augusta said :

" That may be all very well, but I've got the feeling that the man's unlucky. It's a superstition, perhaps, but I can't get away from it. What is to prevent his going and losing all his money ? "

" I," Mr. Blood said rather determinedly, " I'm the man that will prevent that."

Augusta said :

" Of course that makes it feel a little better, but still——" she broke off and, gazing at the dancers, shook her head very slightly. One side of each of their faces was in deep shadow, so that they were silhouetted against the light. The orchestra had sunk its tones to an absolute pianissimo, and there was in the audience, beneath the vast haze of light, an almost complete silence. Augusta added after a moment : " Or I ought to say that it makes the money perfectly safe, but still I've the sense that some disaster——" She did not finish her sentence. The orchestra wailed, leaving upon the ear a sense of not being satisfied. A dancer in a blue and glittering gown was fainting over a mossy bank. . . .

" Hasn't it occurred to you," Mr. Blood said rather

earnestly, " that you'll probably, when you marry him, be poor Mr. Fleight's absolutely worst disaster yourself ?"

Augusta continued to gaze in front of her for a minute or two. Then she said :

" No, I don't see how I could be. I'm perfectly healthy, not in the least neurotic, and absolutely good-tempered. If I shouldn't make him happy, who in the world would ? "

" Well," Mr. Blood answered, " I've still got the sense —a sense just as strong as that other one of yours—that you'll prove the greatest possible disaster for poor Aaron. I don't see how it's going to happen, but I feel it. I don't think it'll come through ill-health or your going off with another man——"

Augusta said : " Oh, that ! " and made with her right hand a gesture of the most unspeakable contempt.

" Well," Mr. Blood retorted, " it will as likely as not be just that. The coldness of your temperament—the fact that you obviously can't take an interest in any man. Poor Mr. Fleight loves with a wild, mad, helpless, impossible passion. And, mind you, he'll go on just as he's begun and you won't be capable of making any sentimental return."

" Well," Augusta said quite coolly, " I'll warrant that he would have perfectly healthy children."

" My dear Augusta," Mr. Blood said, " I'm not going to go on discussing the possible disasters that might overtake our poor friend, but I think you're now easy in your mind about his money. And to turn the discussion upon yourself, your last remark is just the sort of remark that you ought not to allow yourself to make. It doesn't worry me, but it's a frame of mind that won't go down in this country. It's the perfectly plain common sense of the matter that we're talking about, but in England you

really mustn't ever, no matter what you may be talking about, look at any subject from the standpoint of plain common sense. If you do, you'll let some of it slip out, and that is disaster."

"But I can't see," Augusta said, "why I shouldn't talk about it. The business of marriage is to provide healthy and legitimate children."

"But good heavens, Augusta!" Mr. Blood said, "that may be the business of a marriage in Germany, and it is the business of marriage here, but one absolutely dare not say so. In this country the business of marriage is to join two loving hearts in a union that it's better not to talk about, compounded of sympathy and bearing up and not letting the servants know that you quarrel."

"It sounds perfect rot to me," Augusta said; "but I've no doubt you're correct. These are the most idiotic people that I've ever conceived. It's like living in a lunatic asylum, where you do nothing but play blind man's buff all day long. But, of course, if you tell me that's how I've got to behave, if I ever did marry Mr. Fleight, I'd be particularly careful that the servants shouldn't know we quarrelled. Not that I can imagine any possibility of quarrelling with him; he doesn't interest me enough."

"You know, Augusta," Mr. Blood said reasonably, "what you'll have to do is to get an encyclopædia and go through it carefully, marking out how you may talk about the things that it contains. Thus, in general company you mustn't ever talk about marriage and its problems except in terms of the servants. And you mustn't ever talk about the servants except in terms of the lower classes. And you mustn't ever talk about the lower classes because they're the poor. And you mustn't ever talk about the poor except in terms of the Bazaar at

St. Mark's, Kilburn. And you must be very careful about St. Mark's, because St. Mark's has something to do with God, and God you must never mention at all."

"Then it doesn't seem to me," Augusta said, "that there's any single thing that one can talk about."

"You know, Augusta," Mr. Blood said, "you can be extraordinarily intelligent at times—for a German living in the birthplace of Christianity."

Augusta did not take the trouble to understand this gibe; she answered instead:

"That's all very well; but supposing you were to quarrel with Mr. Fleight?"

"I!" Mr. Blood exclaimed. "Quarrel with Mr. Fleight! Good heavens!"

"I suppose," Augusta answered, "you mean that Mr. Fleight and I and the greater part of the world are so inestimably below you that it would be utterly impossible for you to quarrel with us?"

"I should try to phrase it more tactfully," Mr. Blood answered, "but that's something like what it comes to. You startled it out of me. It was such an extraordinarily new idea. Of course I couldn't quarrel with poor Fleight."

"It's satisfactory to know that," Augusta said; "but it's odious and detestable the way you behave."

"But, my dear," Mr. Blood said amiably, "it's the way one keeps oneself alive. If I didn't think myself superior to Mr. Fleight I should take to drink, just as you, if you didn't think you had better hair and a finer figure than Wilhelmina, would be so humiliated that you wouldn't ever be any good in the world. Great heavens! if the crossing sweeper at the bottom of the road with the medals of three campaigns on his breast, didn't think himself superior to the ragged tramp he sees picking up

a cigarette end, he'd die, too. This life isn't good enough for us to live it if we didn't cherish our illusions. Why, if I didn't think myself better than Mr. Fleight, I'd take a peerage and every one of my ancestors would turn in their coffins for thirteen hundred years back."

"I don't know what this is all about," Augusta said. "It seems to me to be nonsense. If you want to be conceited, you can be conceited without talking about it so much. But I've been thinking about this matter of marrying Mr. Fleight. I daresay you think that I'm rather a fool, because I'm a poor girl and Mr. Fleight is a millionaire, and I ought to jump at the offer. But it isn't as simple as you think. Of course, I want diamonds and large houses and carriages and that sort of thing. Every woman does. But I might get them from another man and not lose my self-respect. For there's no doubt that I shall lose my self-respect if I marry Mr. Fleight. You don't, I think, quite understand what it is for a German woman to marry a Jew. There's no explaining it. It's worse, far worse, than if your own sister married a bricklayer. It's almost unspeakable. Of course, I know that this isn't Germany. And, of course, I know that Jews here can rise to high positions under the Crown. And if one rose to a high position in the Government, one might recover some of one's self-respect. Supposing, for instance, I became a British peeress and the mother of a British peer, I might forget to remember all day long that I was a dishonoured German. But it's a risk—you must admit that it's a risk."

Mr. Blood looked at her and spoke with a seriousness far greater than any he had yet shown.

"Of course, Augusta," he said, "I admit that it's a risk. I admit that your point of view is perfectly

reasonable. Money is almost everything in the world. Almost everything. But I'll tell you what——"

He paused gravely and considered Mr. Macpherson, who, in the crowd beneath them, was causing some commotion by attempting to push through towards the garden doors.

"Confound it!" Mr. Blood began again, "here I am, taking up responsibilities. I'm a sentimentalist, that's what I am. I began this just as a lark, but here I am——"

He paused again, but when he did speak his words came with much greater firmness.

"Now listen," he said. "I'll make you this offer. If you marry our poor friend, I'll look after you. I'll look after you personally. I'll see that my women have to do with you socially. I'll push Mr. Fleight with my own personal influence instead of merely just showing him what to do. As for a peerage—that's just nothing. I could buy him and you a peerage to-morrow as a wedding present, for it's just as much a marketable commodity as a diamond tiara. There's every possible reason why Mr. Fleight should have a peerage. He's one of the pillars of society. He and his father before him have benefited the community by the creation of an enormous industry——"

"Now you're getting cynical again," Augusta said.

"I'm not," Mr. Blood said; "it's all perfectly true. He deserves a peerage, just as his soap deserves a gold medal at an international exhibition. It's good stuff. The gold medal would make more people buy the soap, and so would the peerage, and the more people who buy his soap the better it is for the world, because it's thoroughly good stuff, and most soaps aren't. So that you may be certain of your peerage."

"Ah! but I don't so much want that sort of peerage," Augusta answered. "I want one that comes after a career. One that comes after you've fought a long time. Like that of—what was the Jew's name?—Disraeli! There was something august about that. I could sleep soundly on a pillow that had that sort of coronet embroidered upon it."

"Well, he's got quite a good chance for that," Mr. Blood said, "quite a good chance."

Augusta remained silent for some seconds Then she brought out suddenly:

"This is a tremendous lot of talk. Too much talk. If your Fleight can point to any single instance of real luck happening to him from this day on, I'll marry him. I tell you I don't object to him. I'm just frightened of him."

"But," Mr. Blood said, "look at this party. Isn't it the most amazing luck for him to get all these people together just five days after he was so hopelessly discredited?"

"Oh, that isn't luck," Augusta answered, "he's just bought that. And even his money isn't luck, because, as he's said so often, he'd be much happier if he were keeping a small shop. What I mean is a piece of outside luck——" She paused for a moment and remained lost in thought. The dancers were kissing their hands from the stage, their dance having just come to a conclusion, and the audience was breaking into eddies and swirls like water in a sluice when the gates are opened. They were beginning to feel within themselves the stirring for supper. Some were making out through the immensely tall windows into the dark garden; some disappearing beneath the boxes through the door that ave into the supper room. The Chancellor, who had

gone down from his box, was standing exactly under the centre of the dome talking to Mr. Macpherson; and the people on each side of him were going away in a steady stream, so that Mr. Parment stood there visible and deserted.

"Even at his own party," Augusta said, "the wretched man hasn't seen his own Russian dancers, and he won't get any supper. I don't see what he is to get. He's throwing all this money away! For nothing."

The hall was growing more and more deserted, and Mr. Macpherson was talking more and more volubly to the Chancellor. They could even hear his voice exclaiming:

"I knew a chap——" but those words were so familiar to them that they could have made them out almost by the motion of his lips.

"I'll tell you what," Augusta said, with a sudden firmness. "I'll marry him if he wins this election. I suppose that's what he's spent all this money for; and, if he gets in, I'll marry him."

"But that's absolutely impossible," Mr. Blood said; "his agent said so this afternoon. It was even difficult to get chaps to back his nomination papers when we handed them in. You know that. Nothing but a miracle could get him in now; but, of course, he'll get in later, I'll guarantee that."

"That's what I mean by luck," Augusta said—"a miracle."

The space between Mr. Parment and the door was now entirely vacant, and they perceived crossing it the figure of Mr. Reginald Debenham, the fourth Government junior whip. His step was very swift and his face was full of perturbation. When he approached the Chancellor he spoke three words.

Suddenly Mr. Macpherson started away from them with a leap that suggested the motions of a kangaroo. He screamed out as he came towards the boxes, and he beckoned with his hand to somebody who must be standing right under their feet. "Mr. Fleight," they could hear him cry, "I say, Fleight! Isn't it glorious? Isn't it exciting!" He disappeared beneath their feet and they could still hear his voice crying out on a very high note:

"Mr. Fleight! I say, where's Mr. Fleight? The Chancellor wants him."

Mr. Blood stood up with a sharp, agitated movement.

"A miracle!" he exclaimed. "Luck! I believe it's come. Come along! Come along with me!"

He gripped her by the wrist and went with her down the passage, behind the boxes and across the floor to where the Chancellor stood listening to Mr. Debenham, who was talking in low tones. On the way they were overtaken and passed by Cluny Macpherson, who was urging on Mr. Fleight. Mr. Fleight appeared exceedingly calm, but quite dejected. There was about the Chancellor, in the great, bright space, an air of deep solemnity. Mr. Debenham, on the other hand, was plainly enraged. He clenched his teeth and seemed as if he wished to spit. Four servants in livery were rolling up the immense, pink carpets in preparation for the dance that was to follow. Some of the guests were crowding in knots out of the supper-room doors. They hung back, however, as if they did not wish to intrude upon the great man and his council. The two front-bench Government men were walking slowly towards them as if they had certain rights to share in the deliberation, but did not wish to arrive indiscreetly soon. The Leader of the Opposition, supported by his two followers,

and having Miss Langham, the novelist, in her torn scarlet velvet dress, still upon his arm, remained stationary in front of the box that had lately been occupied by Mr. Blood and Augusta. He appeared to expect that Mr. Fleight would come and join him.

With his manner of enormous solemnity the Chancellor addressed Mr. Fleight:

"I can't use the word 'congratulations,'" he said, "they couldn't be expected from me." He stumbled in his speech for a moment, but then he added: "Still, I have hopes of seeing you—enrolled behind me—when you come to understand public problems better. The great truths—the great, fine truths—you'll come to understand."

With his calmness entirely unruffled Mr. Fleight said:

"I don't quite know what has happened. Macpherson says I have won my election, but I don't know how."

Mr. Debenham let his intense anger loose in the words:

"Yes, you've scraped in. That ass Gregory died this morning of a cold in his head, the fool! Inflammation of the lungs! Got his feet wet! As if an ass couldn't get his feet wet without dying!"

"Then I——" Mr. Fleight was beginning. . . .

"You," Mr. Debenham said, "confound you! there was no one to be nominated against you! You're returned unopposed. I suppose you're to be congratulated, but it certainly won't be I that do it. It's the worst kind of luck!"

"It's the best kind of luck for Mr. Rothweil," Mr. Blood suddenly made his voice heard. "It's what you might call a miracle."

He went towards the Chancellor, who was swaying from side to side upon his legs. "You'll permit me,"

he said, " to differ from you. You can perfectly fittingly congratulate our friend upon——"

Augusta was standing all alone. Her blonde face had an absent expression as if she were slightly dazed.

" The future Lady Rothweil," Mr. Blood concluded his speech, " for she has just promised to marry our friend."

Mr. Fleight said only : " Ah ! "

Mr. Macpherson exclaimed :

" Oh, I say—Augusta ! "

Mr. Debenham, as a gentlemanly man of the world, tried to compose his features to an urbanity fitting the occasion. The Chancellor contrived it with much more success, and with the pompous humour of a man six foot high addressing a small child, he begged to be introduced to her ladyship, for he took Augusta to be a person of title.

Mr. Fleight remained perfectly still, gazing into vacancy in front of him. They were all crowding round Augusta, and suddenly the words that he had uttered to Gilda Leroy in the little shop on the Saturday before he had begun his election campaign came into his head. For the rest of his life—there would be the palm plants, and the marble staircases, and the Christian wife he was only too sadly aware he had purchased, standing at the top of the stairs in white satin, whilst the invisible orchestra played the Preislied out of the " Meistersingers." He was standing quite alone ; all the rest of them were crowding round Augusta. He shrugged his shoulders right up to his ears and let them slowly fall.

Suddenly a thin, dark, hard-bitten man was asking him in tones of deep English politeness—the formidable tones that so set Mr. Fleight's teeth on edge—whether he wouldn't go and talk to Mr. Butler, the Leader of

the Opposition. It was a man called Stevens, who had been Colonial Secretary in the last Opposition administration. This, in fact, was being treated with deference by the really great.

A long way from the group which contained Augusta, Mr. Fleight stood listening to the words of Mr. Butler, his chief and leader.

"It's really splendid!" that gentleman was saying. "It's much better than would appear, simply because people are so superstitious nowadays. It isn't merely because the poor devil's dropped dead, it's because it marks you out as such a lucky man. And on such a public occasion as this. It ought to hearten the party up in a most extraordinary manner. Because you're certainly the luckiest man in London, and it does us good to think that we've got you amongst us. There's no knowing where you mightn't get to if such luck as this continues."

"The luckiest man in London!" Mr. Fleight said absently. "Yes, certainly, I'm all that." His eyes were watching Augusta, who, upon the Chancellor's arm, and with the great man leaning jocularly and almost affectionately over her, was laughing brilliantly as, with buoyant steps and her great fair head thrown back, she disappeared with him through the doorway that led into the dark garden.

## EPILOGUE

ON Christmas Day, at 11 o'clock in the morning, Mr. Blood walked up the steps of the large building known as Whitehall Court. He told the porter to send up and tell Mr. Rothweil, who, during the period of his waiting for the marriage with Augusta and for the preparation of their residence in Cadogan Square, had taken a suite of furnished rooms in this building—to tell Mr. Rothweil that Mr. Blood was awaiting him in the smoking room of the What-Not Club, where Mr. Fleight had first made his acquaintance on the previous Derby Day.

It seemed longer ago. The room was quite empty, as it had been then, and Mr. Blood sank down into the arm-chair that he had occupied on that occasion. It was a clear, grey day and very still, so that the Embankment was plainly visible. Mr. Blood sat looking at the white flakes of gulls' wings that whirled above the river. And then, insensibly, he began to count the vehicles on the Embankment, comparing those that were drawn by horses with those that were mechanically propelled. There was hardly a horse at all. Everything glided along swiftly and like an insect without visible legs. There was just one carriage and pair which went eastward, and Mr. Blood considered that this must be the vehicle of either Bowl, K.C., or Freshfield, K.C., who had probably sat up all night in the Temple over some case—and Mr. Blood knew that both of these great counsel had several very complicated cases pending

—and was now being fetched home in time to attend Divine service with the remainder of his family.

Mr. Blood also noticed that the wooden-legged waterman, who generally attended on the cab-rank at the corner of the gardens, was absent, so that either his bronchitis had carried him off or he was in prison for having assaulted his wife. The carriage and pair returned going westward, and Mr. Blood was satisfied that its occupant must be Freshfield, K.C., because that gentleman hated to keep his horses standing, whereas Bowl, K.C., did not care at all. He had counted one hundred and forty-seven motor vehicles as against eleven horses when he was aware that Mr. Fleight was standing beside him. The high voice of Mr. Macpherson came from the hall, where he was engaged in reading the names on the letters of members stuck up on a green baize board. Mr. Macpherson did this because, in the first place he wished to know who the members might be, and in the second, he knew a great many handwritings and might thus get to know who wrote to them.

Mr. Blood, sprawling back in his chair, repeated aloud the numbers, "a hundred and forty-seven," and "eleven" in order to fix them in his memory. And then Mr. Fleight remarked :

" It doesn't prove anything."

Mr. Blood said :

" Who the devil said that it did ? "

And just at that moment Mr. Macpherson burst upon them with the exclamation :

" What's that ? What are you talking about ? " And then he couldn't refrain from bringing out the informa tion, and his tones were of the gladdest :

" I say—Augusta says that Fleight dresses very well.

She says he looks quite decent when he's got his best things on. Isn't that fine? Isn't that jolly? Doesn't it prove that she's beginning to like him and that the marriage is going to be a huge success?"

Mr. Blood looked lazily at Mr. Fleight. The silk revers of Mr. Fleight's frock coat had a lustre of an unapproached luminosity. In his button-hole there was a large white gardenia. His waistcoat slips were whiter than they could have imagined white to be. His lavender-coloured trousers were so exactly creased that his legs might have been encased in stiff, folded paper. His top hat shone so that you might have imagined that, like a mirror, it would have been obscured had you breathed upon it. And so did his black satin tie, which was decorated with one large diamond.

"I certainly can see," Mr. Blood said, "how immensely Augusta must admire——" He had intended to say "your get up," but, with a kindly impulse—for, after all, the poor little beggar had had a devil of a time—he changed the words into "you."

And for the first time the face of Mr. Fleight changed. The lines of his mouth lifted, and the lines from his nostrils to the corners of his lips. The wrinkles disappeared from his brow; his eyelids opened and his eyes shone so that he appeared at last as radiant as his clothing.

"You really think," he stuttered, "that Augusta——" And then in the excess of his emotion he felt suddenly faint and he became almost pale. "If only I could think that it wasn't only for my——"

In order to cover his embarrassment Mr. Blood addressed Mr. Macpherson:

"Mr. Fleight," he said, "is of opinion that my being here on Christmas Day in order to go with him and you

to a synagogue and give away a Teutonic young lady called Macphail who hasn't anyone else in particular to give her away—Mr. Fleight thinks that this singular collocation of circumstances doesn't prove anything."

Mr. Macpherson interrupted him, and, just as Mr. Fleight had that day for the first time exhibited rapture, so, for the first time, Mr. Macpherson's voice indicated contempt :

" Proof ! " he exclaimed ; " what sort of word is that to use in the twentieth century ? Aren't we all just friendly agnostics ? I know a chap called Professor Karl Schlummeberger, of the University of Jena, and that's what he said to me. He's professor of applied mathematics or Elizabethan literature, or it may have been bacteriology. Anyhow, I know he was a scientist and he was a very jolly old boy. And that's what he said to me one day when I had taken his wife some Ceylon tea as a present. He said, ' We are all friendly agnostics,' and that's what we are. There's not a single thing that we can know. We haven't any one of us got any religion ; and science, that everybody used to be so frightened of, has given up the attempt to prove anything. But we're a nice, pleasant lot, and we don't burn anybody and we don't even write letters abusing each other in the *Times*, as Huxley and Mr. Gladstone and that sort of person used to do. And I'm sure it's much better like that. Isn't it fun to think that you might be a Manichæan—whatever that may be—if you wanted to, without any St. Dominic to come along with an inquisition ? Why, only three weeks ago I wanted to see how many crank religious services I could go to in one week, and I went to twenty-seven, not one of which was Catholic or Protestant. But they were all New Thought,

and Higher Culture, and Neo-Esotericism, and all in houses of quite the best people."

"But still," Mr. Blood said, "my being here upon Christmas Day counting the traffic is an immense proof of one thing concerning myself. For instance, this is Christmas Day. Now every year since the time when mechanically-propelled traffic first didn't have to have a chap with a red flag walking in front of it, I've come here to analyse the traffic—on Derby Day, because it's the festival of the horse and most boring of all the great meetings."

"But you couldn't have come so long ago as that," Mr. Macpherson said. "When the first motor car broke down twenty-nine times in the run from London to Brighton, you couldn't have foreseen this change."

"It's precisely what I did foresee," Mr. Blood said. "Change! Don't you suppose that I could foretell how, with all the restless brains at work, motors would be made more efficient every day and cheaper every day? It's a thing that can be done. Take any blessed thing you like—take, say, dairies. Bless you, dairies are going to disappear along with the four-horse coach and the cow! We are going to have synthetic milk without any tuberculosis or typhoid germs. And we shall mix it on our breakfast table and put a little electric buzzer into it that will turn it into butter in three-and-a-quarter minutes."

"Well, and why shouldn't we?" Mr. Macpherson said.

"I don't see why we shouldn't," Mr. Blood answered. "A lot of dairymen will starve and a lot of milkmen and a lot of dairymaids and a lot of farmers, and our friend Fleight here, or some man like him, will add twenty-six million pounds to his fortune because he'll have bought the process from some unfortunate inventor for three hundred and twenty-six pounds ten shillings."

"Well, that's all right," Mr. Macpherson said amiably; "that's the spirit of the time."

"So it is," Mr. Blood answered. "I've got nothing against it, except that I don't like being here on Christmas Day instead of Derby Day. It's a personal deterioration in myself. I don't like it. I foresee that I, too, shall die a British peer."

"I don't see how you get at that," Mr. Macpherson said.

But Mr. Blood only nodded his head with an expression of the deepest gloom.

Mr. Fleight had been fidgetting nervously for some minutes past.

"Hadn't we better be going?" he said at last. "I do want to get married, you know."

Mr. Blood moved resignedly forward in his chair.

"Christmas Day or Derby Day," he remarked, "that's one thing that doesn't change."

"I don't see why it should, you know," Mr. Fleight answered; "and I don't see that it proves anything."

"Oh, don't you?" Mr. Blood answered. And all three, holding their top hats in their hands, made their way towards the swing doors of the smoking room.

In honour of his situation, and with the mien of a modest conqueror, Mr. Fleight went out first.

THE END.

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